NATIONAL CEMETERY SYSTEM

HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON
HOUSING AND MEMORIAL AFFAIRS

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED SECOND CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

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NATIONAL CEMETERY SYSTEM

THURSDAY, APRIL 18, 1991

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND MEMORIAL AFFAIRS,
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS,
Washington, DC.

The subcommittee met at 9:30 am., in room 334, Cannon House Office Building; Hon. Harley O. Staggers, Jr. (chairman) presiding.

Present: Representatives Staggers, Jones, Pickett, Paxon, Nichols, and Stearns.

OPENING STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN STAGGERS

Mr. STAGGERS. I am pleased that we have several members who are going to be with us. Tony Principi, deputy secretary, will also be testifying. I am very pleased that he will be accompanied by Jo Ann Webb, the director of the National Cemetery System. Unfortunately, because of a reorganization plan, Mrs. Webb will be leaving the National Cemetery System. I am very sorry to see her go. She has done an outstanding job in her present position and I am sure that she will do an outstanding job in her new position.

At the outset, I wish to mention that Mrs. Webb has fought valiantly in behalf of the funding needs of the National Cemetery System. In spite of her efforts, we are faced today with the system's deterioration.

Every year the subcommittee holds an oversight hearing on the National Cemetery System, a symbol representing this Nation's shrine to our fallen defenders.

Just as the first of southern California's Persian Gulf casualties were being buried, 20 acres of the Riverside National Cemetery turned into sinkholes. This is shameful and appalling. It is just one example of the neglect that has plagued the overall funding levels of the National Cemetery System for years.

We will hear testimony today from the Veterans' Administration stating that the damage at Riverside was caused by torrential rains. This is true, but only in part. According to the Los Angeles Times, private cemeteries in the same area reported no such damage. In addition, my staff called Mr. Bill Keene, the gentleman whose wife is buried at Riverside and who took the photos we will show you shortly. He indicated that the cemetery had been in extremely poor condition for months.

I would like to read an excerpt from a letter I received from Mrs. Lee Ann Howard from Salem, Oregon, who is 70 years old. This letter is dated March 12.

"My husband served in the Navy in World War II. He always told me, 'When it's time for the maker to call me home, I want to be buried in the Vet's cemetery.' So in 1982 when he passed away, I granted his wishes. I have been back there twice. Both times that cemetery was a disgrace to our veterans' cemeteries. To my regret, I could not find my husband's grave, for weeds and gophers had taken over all the graves. This cemetery is at Riverside, California. My husband's grave is in Section 1, Grave 91. Please look into this matter and don't let our service fellows lay in disgrace."

What about the other 112 cemeteries? It is my understanding that the Golden Gate National Cemetery currently has a $60,000 budget for gopher control. However, my subcommittee staff went out there in 1989. According to a recent article which appeared in the Los Angeles Times, there were approximately 100 gophers per acre at that cemetery in 1989. At that time, staff was also advised that the Golden Gate National Cemetery had a larger variety of weeds in that location than anywhere else in the State of California and that botanical students from nearby universities went there to study the weeds. Noteworthy—yes! Something to be proud of—no!

Why does it take congressional interest in a particular cemetery to get adequate funding? Although Golden Gate may now have funding for rodent control, a survey sent out to the field last December indicates that many cemeteries have no funding at all for this purpose. As a matter of fact, the majority of cemeteries report that they could use additional funding for grave sinkage, mowing, sodding and equipment repair and replacement.

Given the conditions that exist in most cemeteries throughout the country, why did Secretary Derwinski not ask for new funding when Congress was considering a supplemental for Operation Desert Storm? After all, it is reasonable to assume that the patriotism generated by the Persian Gulf War will bring thousands of new people to our national cemeteries not only on Memorial Day and on the 4th of July, but throughout the year.

It is my understanding that in the last 4 years alone the National Cemetery System budget request has been short by $38.9 million. Interment and gravesite maintenance workload has gone up by 36.1 percent and 28.4 percent respectively, but employment levels have gone down by 5.4 percent. We have a cemetery which is fully constructed in northern California but we can't open it because there is no money in the Administration's request. This just doesn't make sense to me.

I am aware that many witnesses will state in their testimony that the National Cemetery System should not be transferred to the American Battle Monuments Commission.

Let me show you a couple of pictures. The first depicts a typical cemetery administered by the ABMC. The second is a photo of Riverside administered by the VA. It is obvious where we would want our loved ones to be buried. I also want to take this opportunity to show you other examples of what our national cemeteries could look like if we don't fund them adequately.

[The prepared statement of the Chairman Staggers appears on p. 51.]

Mr. STAGGERS. Before we hear from our first witness, I would like to recognize the ranking member, who I don't think has made it. He does have an opening statement, which will be made part of the record, without objection. I hear no objection. So ordered.

[The statement of Hon. Dan Burton appears on p. 65.]

Mr. STAGGERS. Any other member who has an opening statement, if he wishes to enter it into the record, we will do that.

I would also advise witnesses that their full statements will be made part of the record. If they wish to summarize, we would appreciate that.

The first person we have with us today, I am very honored to have with us, because he was my chairman when I first got here. He has been a leader in a lot of different issues. I really appreciate his interest in the National Cemetery System. George Brown is from the 36th District of California. We look forward to your testimony.

STATEMENT OF HON. GEORGE E. BROWN, JR., A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA

Mr. BROWN. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I apologize for the condition of my voice, but it will lead me to be mercifully brief in my statement. I have a longer statement, which I assume you will include in the record.

Mr. STAGGERS. Without objection, so ordered.

Mr. BROWN. I happen to be blessed with the responsibility of representing a congressional district which was Riverside National Cemetery. If you think that you have been the subject of critical comment as a result of the cemetery, you should recognize that those of us who live there face an even greater amount of comment and criticism as a result of the condition of the cemetery.

Let me pause at this point and recognize my good friend Mr. Lewis, who I think wants to make the same sort of comments that I am going to make.

Mr. LEWIS. I am pleased to be with you, George.

Mr. BROWN. I have followed the condition of the Riverside Cemetery since it was a mere gleam in the eyes of the Administration. It was our hope that this new cemetery, which is among the most active in the National Cemetery System would be a jewel in the crown of our Veterans Affairs operations. Unfortunately, we have faced a situation where there has been a continued lack of budgetary resources to keep it properly maintained.

In light of the circumstances that have developed over the last few weeks, particularly the kind of public attention which you are well aware of—this Los Angeles Times article is an illustration of it—I made a personal visit over the Easter recess to see if the situation had changed any. There was both good news and bad news.

First of all, the superintendent is doing her very best under the circumstances to correct the problems that exist there with totally inadequate resources, which I am sure you are aware of. The cemetery has never had the capacity to completely seed and sod the cemetery, and burials are taking place in bare ground with the weeds and other things that have been commented on. It was this circumstance, the lack of grass and lack of sod, that led to the

problems of the sinkage of the graves which occurred during our unusually heavy rains.

I recognize that this may be a very rare and unusual circumstance, but the condition of the cemetery itself, because of the lack of resources to finish the job of putting in grass before the burials take place is the overriding problem that needs to be faced.

As you have pointed out, Mr. Chairman, the National Cemetery System has been underfunded. It was obviously felt that no one was going to pay much attention and that the people buried there weren't going to complain, and so corners have been cut there. The requests from the Department of Veterans Affairs have been consistently reduced by OMB and we are faced with the problem where they haven't been able to address this problem.

I was frankly shocked during my visit there to see the rather substantial acreage, which is a barren field, in effect. The only good news was that there was an effort being made. There were contractors on the site who were doing their best to remedy this with some emergency funding that had been provided. I think this is a commendable effort, but I don't think it is going to be adequate in the long run to solve the problem created by a sustained shortage of adequate maintenance funding over a period of several years.

I don't know what the solution is, Mr. Chairman. The proposal to switch the responsibility to the Battle Monuments Commission may be the best way. Certainly it is going to get the attention of the VA. That is something to be highly desired. But I don't think that it is a feasible course of action to continue to expose the deceased veterans of this country and their friends and their loved ones to the sight of this cemetery which is in no way adequate to the standards that we expect of the final resting place for the men who have given their lives for this country.

I want to commend you for focusing attention on it. I look forward to your hearings out in California later on. I feel that this may be the step that will precipitate a major change in the way we are handling this problem, and I thank you for it.

Mr. STAGGERS. We will hold our questions since our distinguished colleague, Mr. Lewis, is here. Mr. Lewis, if you want to proceed with your testimony.

[The prepared statement of the Congressman Brown appears on p. 70.]

STATEMENT OF HON. ALFRED A. MCCANDLESS, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA, PRESENTED BY HON. JERRY LEWIS, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA

Mr. LEWIS. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman and colleagues. It is my pleasure to join my good friend George Brown at this hearing to express our concerns about the Riverside Cemetery. That facility is not appropriately cared for currently.

I am here to present the testimony of my colleague Al McCandless, who is currently on his way to the Middle East with the Chairman of the Committee. He wanted me to submit this material for him and make what comments I could.

We all know that we are in a constituent oriented business. Congress pays attention to those constituents who protest most effectively. Unfortunately, in this case the constituents can't be heard very well.

Our area is one of immense commitment to our national defense. Within the Riverside-San Bernardino County area there was once a single congressional district represented by a fellow, who for 28 years, served on the Appropriations Committee. For half that time he was the chairman of the Subcommittee on Military Construction. That was during the big war years. So there are places like March, George, Norton, Edwards, 29 Palms Marine Base, the National Training Center for the Army. To say the least, the area has many military facilities.

With that commitment to our national defense has come an endless flow of veterans who have returned to our region. That is how the cemetery itself was developed in the first place. The demand was in the region. It was very, very appropriate. It was to be a shining star for those who have given so much on behalf of our country.

Al McCandless says in his testimony, that he lost five men and women in the Middle East, one of the bigger losses among congressional districts. Those people were laid to rest at this cemetery. They found a portion of it that was halfway kept up, but they are very hesitant to have the news media come near because they didn't want to repeat the story of this disgrace.

This is a significant problem whereby we symbolize our lack of concern for our very best. So I have come to join George today, to urge you to see what we can do about this.

I do want you to come out to my district one of these days, friends, and see the Pettis Memorial Hospital and visit the stealth bomber. I do not want to take you to this cemetery at this moment.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

[The statement of Hon. Al McCandless appears on p. 72.]

Mr. STAGGERS. George, I understand that there may be a letter from some of the California members to Mr. Derwinski. I would appreciate if you could share that with the subcommittee members.

Mr. BROWN. I will be glad to do that.

Mr. STAGGERS. As you mentioned, the subcommittee will be traveling to California. I believe we will be out at Riverside on May 12. We welcome all the delegation to join us there.

Mr. Jones.

Mr. JONES. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I don't have any questions. I think the problem is obvious and the problem is clear. I appreciate your coming here to bring our attention to the problem at Riverside. I used to live out there. As a matter of fact, I worked very near there.

Although a lot of people might not think that this should be high on the national agenda, I think it is a problem that reflects who we are. How we care for those who made the sacrifice, how we care for those who have committed so much to the protection of this country and all that we have, that they can't rest in dignity is a reflection of our values. I think it says something about our priorities. I think it is an appalling situation and I think it is one that we

should address. Obviously we have the resources to do that and we should direct them to that. We thank you for coming today.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. BROWN. I appreciate those comments. There is, as my good friend Jerry Lewis has pointed out, an increasing focus on military veterans in this area. It begins with the servicemen in the many installations there, but more and more they are returning to the area. There is retired military housing there; there is the Veterans Hospital, which bears the name of our former colleague; and there is the cemetery, which is the newest addition, but it is intended to complement the region, and it is not doing that. It is turning people off, as a matter of fact.

I know the committee has been out there. I have participated in hearings which led to the designation of this site, which were held in that area. Of course, I have some nostalgia about appearing here. In the good part of my life, in the 1960s, I served on this Committee for 8 years and I enjoyed the opportunity to do that very much.

Mr. STAGGERS. Mr. Paxon.

Mr. PAXON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this hearing and for allowing our colleagues to testify today. I commend you both for taking time and the leadership to bring this issue to our attention. I took a look last night at the copies of the photographs—the copies are bad enough; they are gut wrenching—but for the families involved they have to be heartbreaking. There is absolutely no excuse for this in a trillion dollar-plus Federal budget: that we can't find the resources to care for those who have labored so long and so hard for this Nation. I think it is a disgrace. It is certainly something that this committee and this Congress can and must address, working with the Department. That is the purpose of this hearing and certainly our goal, my goal as a member, and I am sure we all share it, to address this as quickly as possible.

Thank you.

Mr. STAGGERS. Mr. Pickett.

Mr. PICKETT. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I came in late but I quickly surveyed the materials here and I understand the problem. I concur in the remarks that my colleagues have made. I will certainly lend my support to see that appropriate action is taken to correct this injustice to our service people.

Mr. STAGGERS. Mr. Nichols.

Mr. NICHOLS. Mr. Chairman, I likewise am really stunned and shocked by these pictures, which I have seen twice now. I guess the big concern I would have is, is this just Riverside? Is this other cemeteries? How many cemeteries? How many people? We have been to parades; we have been to reunions; we have been giving speeches at veterans groups; we have toured VA hospitals; but we haven't seen anything like this. This is a tragic disgrace. We need to get on it.

Mr. STAGGERS. If the gentleman will yield, you will have an opportunity to hear from VA and they will be able to answer that question if you will stick around.

Mr. NICHOLS. I will try. I have some other meetings and obligations, but I would like to hear that. Thank you.

Mr. STAGGERS. I appreciate my colleagues coming.

Mr. BROWN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. LEWIS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. STAGGERS. We do have some other members scheduled but at this time why don't we go ahead with Mr. Principi. He will be accompanied by Jo Ann Webb.

STATEMENT OF ANTHONY J. PRINCIPI, DEPUTY SECRETARY, DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS, ACCOMPANIED BY JO ANN K. WEBB, DIRECTOR, NATIONAL CEMETERY SYSTEM

Mr. PRINCIPI. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, I certainly appreciate this opportunity to appear before you on an issue of great import to you and to the members of this Committee, a very, very troubling issue.

I have a prepared statement, but I think in light of your opening remarks and those of the members, that it would be best if I submit my statement for the record and perhaps make a few personal observations with regard to the situation not only of Riverside, but around the Nation. If it is okay with the Committee, I will submit my statement for the record.

Mr. STAGGERS. Without objection, so ordered. The statement will be entered and you can summarize.

Mr. PRINCIPI. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman, I want to be very honest and very open and very candid with you and the members of the Committee regarding the situation in the National Cemetery System. At the outset, yes, I believe there is a need for additional funding.

But honestly, I don't think it is fair to blame Secretary Derwinski or President Bush for underfunding the National Cemetery System, because the fact of the matter is that during the past 6 years, with the exception of 1987, when we were able to increase the funding for the National Cemetery System by approximately $500,000 as a result of congressional appropriations, congressional appropriations in the GOE account have been less than President Reagan and President Bush requested. Funding for the National Cemetery System as a result of congressional appropriations was reduced in 1986 by $3.4 million, in 1988 by $400,000, in 1989 by $1.7 million, in 1990 by $1.4 million, and in 1991 by $1.2 million. So the burden has to be shared equally.

We live in an era of enormous fiscal constraint, but the GOE appropriations from the Congress have been less than the President has requested. No one has been a more forceful advocate for veterans' programs than this Administration. President Bush has been very responsive. Of course we don't receive all we would like to receive when we go to battle with OMB and the White House, but in both of the years that I have been there Secretary Derwinski and I have both gone to OMB and have gone directly to the President, seeking increases in appropriations.

With regard to Riverside, I agree with Congressman Jones' statement that the manner in which we care for our war dead tells us much about a civilized society. I was appalled when I saw those photographs at Riverside National Cemetery, but I think that a mark of a good agency is how you respond to those kinds of crises.

Immediately after that situation I dispatched two teams to Riverside, one from our Office of Facilities, and asked Jo Ann Webb to send a team directly to Riverside. We allocated emergency dollars to Riverside to correct the deplorable and appalling situation there, which was due in part to lack of adequate funding.

Being a resident of southern California, I can tell you after 5 years of drought and restrictions on watering and perhaps some lack of funding, when you get those torrential downpours, when you get 5 inches of rain in 1 day or in a very short period of time, you are going to have a very, very difficult situation with regard to soil. Even in the private cemeteries. Notwithstanding the article that appeared in the Los Angeles Times, some of the photographs that I saw of private cemeteries also had the same problems.

You have to keep in mind that we bury approximately 150 veterans a week at Riverside. In private cemeteries it might be a few, and plots are already purchased and there is grass and sod; all you have to dig up is that one section and bury the body and then put the sod back down. When you are burying 150 veterans in a week, of course you are not going to have sod in place and you are going to get those kinds of conditions.

Because of the actions we have taken, Riverside Cemetery has been restored to a place of dignity today. I am very proud of the actions taken by the agency in responding aggressively and proactively to correct the situation.

We do need more money. I agree with you. And we are going to fight for more money for the National Cemetery System so that we can better compact the soil, have money to water, and ensure that that hydroseed is taking hold.

Mr. Chairman, with regard to your legislation, I believe it is very well intended, but I do believe that it would be best if the National Cemetery System stayed under the penumbra of the VA. I believe we are in a much better position to care for our war dead. Notwithstanding some of the situations that you have described, Riverside being one of them, I believe our national cemeteries by and large are a place that we can take great pride in, that they are relatively well maintained under very difficult financial circumstances, but we have very dedicated people who are very capable at maintaining our very large National Cemetery System.

With regard to supplemental funding, there was a provision in the Desert Storm supplemental. At our request, we were permitted to reprogram $3 million from our Veterans' Benefits Administration, money that was allocated for VBA, the $12 million, to take $3 million and put it into our National Cemetery System so that we can begin to make some inroads in the backlog of equipment and supplies, seed and fertilizer for our cemeteries.

All in all, I think we are coming along. We recognize the gravity of the situation and we are taking proactive steps to address it.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Principi appears on p. 76.]

Mr. STAGGERS. Thank you, Tony.

Congressman Swett has just entered the room. If you all don't mind, can we have him testify and ask you questions later?

Mr. PRINCIPI. Yes, sir. Be happy too.

STATEMENT OF HON. DICK SWETT, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE

Mr. SWETT. Thank you very much for allowing me to come and testify, Mr. Chairman. It is my pleasure to be here. I will be as brief as I possibly can.

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you very much for giving me this opportunity to appear before you today. I am here on behalf of the veterans in my congressional district and throughout the State of New Hampshire to seek your support for the establishment of a State or national veterans' cemetery at Pease Air Force Base, New Hampshire, which is in the process of being decommissioned.

I have received numerous calls and many letters from veterans urging the designation of a military cemetery on a portion of this land. They have expressed the view that New Hampshire veterans deserve their own cemetery, and I fully concur with that view.

The men and women who selflessly answered our country's call to arms in times of conflict deserve the option of being buried in a veterans' cemetery near their homes. All have rejoiced in the outstanding performance of our military forces in the Persian Gulf, as we have in other times of war and peace. But it is our responsibility to provide for those who answered our Nation's call when they are in need. We must do more than simply cheer them on at their hour of victory.

Mr. Chairman, the only veterans' cemetery in all of New England where veterans can now choose to be buried is located in Bourne, Massachusetts, on Cape Cod. This is a considerable distance for the families of New Hampshire veterans and for veterans from all over northern New England. A visit to the grave of a loved one is a traumatic enough experience without adding the experience of a long ride through congested urban traffic.

A significant number of veterans would be served by this potential cemetery. In the State of New Hampshire alone there are 146,000 veterans. In addition, 153,000 veterans live in Maine, 64,000 in Vermont, and some 130,000 veterans in parts of Massachusetts that are closer to the potential New Hampshire site than to the one currently available in Massachusetts.

Mr. Chairman, I am working with the town of Newington, where a part of the base is located, and we are pursuing negotiations with the Pease Development Authority to obtain land for a cemetery through other channels. I am also working with State officials in pursuing other options that might be available to establish a cemetery in New Hampshire.

I know that my Republican colleague from New Hampshire is also very concerned about this matter and is also looking into it. It is my intention to work in a bipartisan effort with my colleague, Mr. Zeliff, from New Hampshire.

Mr. Chairman, I understand the current budget restrictions that limit our actions. Currently the National Cemetery System is in dire need of additional funding, and, like you, I have been horrified by stories of neglected cemeteries and cemeteries that have been approved but not opened because necessary funds have not been made available.

I am here today to articulate a long-held wish of New Hampshire veterans for the designation of a portion of Pease Air Force Base as a veterans' cemetery. I am determined to do all I can to help New Hampshire veterans realize their dream of having a veterans' cemetery in their home state.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

[The prepared statement of Congressman Swett appears on p. 75.]

Mr. STAGGERS. Dick, if you are as tenacious in this issue as you were on the basketball court, I am sure it will become a reality. We are aware of the problem. There are some problems with jurisdictions of committee. I know the Armed Services Committee will be dealing with this also. We are very sympathetic. We will try to help as much as we can.

I don't have any questions. Does any member of the panel have questions?

[No response.]

We do appreciate your being here.

Mr. SWETT. Thank you very much.

Mr. STAGGERS. We will work with you as much as we can.

Mr. SWETT. In response to your remark, I will only add that I am a team player, and I believe very much in doing the leg work that is required to make sure that we are successful in whatever we choose to participate in. Thank you very much for your comment.

Mr. STAGGERS. If we could get Tony and Jo Ann Webb back. I apologize for the interruption. It is realities of life on the Hill.

Mr. PRINCIPI. I understand that fully, sir.

Mr. STAGGERS. I am very happy that you deviated from your prepared testimony. In fact, I think we all agree that we need to look for additional funding. I was glad to see that that is something we can work with.

As far as blame, I am not looking to blame anybody. I think that you are right. Everyone that is connected with this issue has to share in the blame.

Mr. PRINCIPI. Yes, sir. And I certainly don't mean to blame Congress. I don't want to leave that impression.

Mr. STAGGERS. We are not looking to blame anybody either. There is a problem and we have to correct it. What Mr. Swett left with us is that if we can't work through this, then all of us are the losers. I don't think it does much to argue the point of who is to blame. That time has passed. We have something that we can do. That is what my legislation is directed at: Where do we best go from here?

You mentioned the reprogramming. Part of that problem is that veterans will be losing their benefits. That is a very tough problem we are looking at also. We have to keep focusing on what it is our priorities are going to be. This has to be a priority when we are looking at it.

I realize that you all have your battles to fight within the Administration. We have our battles to fight here on the Hill. We just need to continue that cooperation of working together. I am looking for solutions. I am not looking to go back and blame anybody. As I mentioned in my opening statement, I think the person that you had in charge of the cemeteries has done a terrific job.

Mr. PRINCIPI. We agree.

Mr. STAGGERS. She has been a battler. She has provided information. I know that her job has not always been the easiest job, to come before the Congress for something that may not look like something that we should be focusing on.

As Congressman Nichols said, as we go through some of the dances which we do for parades or whatever, we can't forget this is an important shrine to our fallen veterans also.

I guess this is what maybe led to some of your responses, but it is my understanding that in 1989 the National Cemetery System did request $55 million but the VA only submitted to OMB $50 million. In 1990 the request was for $57.5 million, but what the VA submitted to OMB was $51.7 million. In 1991 the NCS requested $61 million; the VA submitted to OMB $59 million.

Fortunately, as you pointed out, we have been moving in the right direction. In 1992 NCS requested $68 million and OMB got a request of $68 million. So there is some good news there.

I guess I can understand OMB. It is an easy target. Once again, I don't want to get into the situation of blame, but if it is just budget constraints, I would like to know. If you can shed some light on that.

Mr. PRINCIPI. I can't speak for all of the previous years, as you know, Mr. Staggers, just the past 2 years. Certainly last year we did go in for a reasonably good increase. Not as much as Jo Ann had requested and fights very hard for. But I believe it is part of those internal battles, those internal priorities and knowing that we have to live within certain dollar figures even before we send our budget request to OMB, and being realistic and posturing ourselves so that we would get the best return, if you will, from OMB.

We have not placed enough emphasis and priority on our National Cemetery System in previous years as we should have. Sometimes it takes a crisis to recognize that they are falling behind. That is precisely what Riverside did to me when I saw it first hand.

Then, of course, at OMB we have the difficulties of competition for the scarce resources and of being told, "Tony, I am cutting back on nutritional programs for children, aid for dependent children, Medicare, Medicaid, even defense, and you are asking for a billion dollar increase or over a billion dollar increase for medical care, an increase in veterans' benefits. We just don't have all that money. We have discretionary caps that we have to live in."

I think with the 1993 budget, next year's budget, we have to look at some reordering of our own internal priorities so that we can make the National Cemetery System whole again. We are falling farther and farther behind.

What troubles me as well is that we are chasing good money after bad. Perhaps in part we could have avoided some of the expenditure that we had to make to restore Riverside Cemetery had we had the dollars up front to adequately compact the soil, money to hydroseed, and money to purchase scarce water to keep that seed germinating.

Those are some of the internal budget battles and frustrations that we have experienced, but I can commit to you, Mr. Staggers, that I intend as long as I am Deputy Secretary—I know the Secre-

tary feels the same way—to place increased priority and attention on our National Cemetery System in the future.

Mr. STAGGERS. I also understand that you have approached some of the veterans groups to solicit volunteer hours and donations of money for equipment for the National Cemetery System. Once again, looking for a solution, I guess that is a good solution, but by contacting veterans groups and requesting their assistance to purchase equipment, doesn't that create the perception that we can't meet the national cemetery needs and maybe we should be looking for the American Battle Monuments Commission to do a job which they could probably do better?

Mr. PRINCIPI. That is a very good question, Mr. Staggers. I would like to try to address it for you. It was my initiative, really. I don't believe that the service organizations should be funding the National Cemetery System. I believe that it is a responsibility of government to care for those who have borne the battle.

I remember at a lunch with the leadership of the DAV I said, you know, the DAV and all the service organizations are really what make the VA great, because we have such a cooperative working relationship. I said just as with the vans and the transportation network you have set up to assist the VA in cutting back on our beneficiary travel payments, so that we can use those dollars to provide increased care to our veterans, I said, you know, it would be great if the DAV could help us in our National Cemetery System. Perhaps there are things you can do there with your volunteers and people who are retired who might be able to go out there and assist at the reception desk or even buy some equipment as you bought the vans.

That is how that came about. It really wasn't meant to be a substitute for adequate funding for the National Cemetery System. I passed that word on to Jo Ann. Certainly the DAV was very enthusiastic about helping us out. I told that to Jo Ann. I said, Jo Ann, you might want to contact the leadership. They said that they could help us in some areas where we have shortfalls in personnel.

It really wasn't a solicitation per se, although perhaps that is maybe how it was proceived. But that's how it came about.

Mr. STAGGERS. It is also my understanding that in 1988 Sylvester Stallone offered to pay the water bill of the national cemetery in Los Angeles but he was turned down. Looking for solutions, maybe it would be better to have the American Battle Monuments Commission. They could solicit this type of funding. I am sure you have heard already this is something Americans feel very strongly about, and maybe we could raise the money. I don't know all the solutions.

Mr. PRINCIPI. If Sylvester Stallone wants to pay the water bill, then I will call him back and tell him I will take the money immediately. I don't know how that occurred.

Ms. WEBB. If I could add. I think volunteerism and involvement with the cemeteries is very critical, because it is an area that a lot of people don't want to get involved in. As far as going to the DAV, I didn't see that as a solicitation. I saw that more as drawing the veterans organizations closer to the cemetery system and looking for opportunities where they could assist and make them feel part of it. You have these adopt-a-highway programs. Adopt a cemetery

for beautification and further involvement. As you look at it, we need more volunteers. Our volunteer network is aging and we need to draw in the younger volunteers, such as from organizations like DAV.

Mr. STAGGERS. I am sure it is an oversight that we have not gotten a list that was supplied to some of the veterans groups. If you can give us a list of the needed equipment, I would like to know that.

Mr. PRINCIPI. We will be happy to, Mr. Chairman.

(Subsequently, the Department of Veterans Affairs submitted the following information:)

Following is the listing of equipment needs supplied to the Disabled American Veterans organization. This listing does not, however, reflect the total replacement equipment needs which currently exist in the National Cemetery System.

DENVER AREA

	Cost
Black Hills N/C Sturgis, South Dakota:	
Van Chev. Suburban 4x4, V8	$ 12,000
Pickup Chev. 4x4w/dumpbox 1 Ton, 4 speed	14,000
	$ 26,000
Eagle Point N/C Eagle Point, Oregon:	
Truckster Diahatsu 4 wheel dr.	$ 9,500
Mower Toro 72"	14,000
Backhoe Kobota MDL B20 4 wheel dr	24,000
Rototiller Kobota 7 Hp	1,550
	$ 49,050
Ft. Bliss N/C Ft. Bliss, Texas:	
Tractor Bolen G274 E 3AEIENG 27Hp, 4cy	$ 10,900
Jack Hammer Schram PB 60sR	1,000
Air Compressor P160w/ J.Deere engine 2 wheel trailer	10,500
Trailer tilt bed 6 1/2'x18'	1,200
Mower (2) Briggs&Stratton 12Hp, 36"cut	5,100
Mower Toro Model 322-D 72" self-prop	13,000
Forklift Clark Mod. DPR-30 3 Ton cap.	29,900
Truckster (2) Cushman M# 898532 w/hydraulic bed	18,200
Sprayer 120 gall. Centri pump, PTO handgun	2,290
Spreader Lely Model WR 3 pt hitch	1,600
Casket Carrier Puckett Supply Model 614	1,525
Trimmer (5) Bunton LBS24K	1,500
	$ 96,715
Ft. Logan N/C Denver, Colorado:	
Van Chev. 2x4 3/4 Ton	$ 20,000
Mower, 72" Toro Model 307 72"rot. blade	8,000
Trucksters 4x4 dies/gas 1500 Lb. payld	9,000
Tamper, Pack Wheel Packwheel Md.TS48S-4 36" Trench	4,000
Tractor Case 580-B Indus/ Diesel	28,000
	$ 69,000
Ft. McPherson N/C Maxwell, Nebraska:	
Mower, 44" (2) Toro Mdl. 117 44" 17Hp	$ 8,400
Truckster Mule Mdl. 1000 2/4wd 500LB ld.	9,000
Lawn Sweeper self-prop. 5' sweep 18Hp	5,000
Dump Truck Dodge 1.5Tn 16000gvw	26,000
Van Dodge Caravan 4 dr.	15,000
Tamper Packwheel Md. TS48S-4 36" Trench	4,000
Air Compressor Lindsay Md. 125Q w/ attach	5,000
Mowers(2) Toro Md. 220-D 62" side disc	26,000
Air Compressor DeVilbiss ProAir Plus 2-stage, 5hp	6,000

DENVER AREA—Continued

	Cost
	$ 104,400
Ft. Snelling N/C Minneapolis, Minnesota:	
Truckster(2) Cushman Mdl. 53289 22Hp, 4 wheel Aux.	20,000
Truckster Kawasaki Mdl. 2020 535 cc forced air	10,000
Truck (2)1 Chev. S-10 Blazer 1/2 Tn 2x4	22,000
Truck Chev. S-10 1/2 Tn 2x4	11,000
Truck, Dump (4) I. Harv. 4600LP 466 Diesel, 6yd.	128,000
Truck, Panel GMC 4x4 3/4 Ton	20,000
Truck, Dump(2) Dodge 350, Auto Comings Diesel	50,000
Tractor, Backhoe Case 580K Extendahoe 4cyc., 63 dsl.,4wd	29,000
Tractor Bobcat Mdl. 2410 Articulated 74Hp.	29,000
Tractor, (2) Ford Mdl. 5610 4 wd.,62 Ilp., dsl.	40,000
Tractor Bolens Mdl. 2104 4 wd, 21Hp	8,000
Mower Toro 322D Mdl.30715 88" cutting width	12,000
Snowblower Mdl. 1812 61"Width, 12"Auger	4,000
Snowplow Wausau TB 3050F 121, 1640 lbs.	2,300
Seeder Lely Mdl. TSSB 200-20 80"	3,500
Slit Seeder Olathe Mdl. 82 30" Swath	3,500
Hydroseeder Finn Mdl. T 50 Diesel, 15HP.	15,000
Mower Toro 322D bidl. 30773 72"	9,000
	$ 416,300
Ft. Rosecrans N/C San Diego, California:	
Truckster Cushman Mdl. 532 22Hp, hvy.duty PTO	$ 8,500
Mowers(2) Toro Mdl. 55620 38", 18HpR	13,000
Weed-eaters(10) Toro Mdl. 51645 TC-5000, 33cc	1,500
Pressure Washer Hydro Tec Mdl. CP3000 3000psi,II Hp	2,200
	$ 25,200
Golden Gate N/C San Bruno, California:	
Bandit (2) Smithco Mdl.K528S 23Hp, 4 cycle	$ 20,000
Mower Toro Mdl. 4000 72", Diesel	11,000
Pneumatic Chnsaw SC-8 Lopper F-6U Compress GP20E	6,000
Backhoe Case Mdl. 580-D 50HP, Diesel	45,000
	$ 8,200
Los Angeles N/C Los Angeles, California:	
Tractor Ford Mdl. A1012T 23Hp. diesel	$ 5,000
Sprayer FMC Bean Mdl. 55T B&SR	2,800
Street Sweeper Amer.-Lincoln Mdl. 2200 var. dump 46Hp	10,500
Rake-o-Vac Toro Mdl. 07073 Kohler 23Hp 62"	5,100
Mower Kut-Kwik Mdl. J-1001-36 Kohler 10Hp 36"	3,400
	$ 26,800
Riverside N/C Riverside, California:	
Trucks, Dump (7) Int'l Harv. Model 1600 2dr. 5yd cap.	$ 245,000
Truckster (9) Cushman Model 532 hydralic dump	81,000
Mower Groundmaster 580D 80Hp	12,000
Mower(2) Groundmaster Model 72 72"	18,000
Mower(2) Groundmaster Model 84 88", 4 cyl.	26,000
Aerator Ryan Mdl. 544317B 72", 3/4"tine	3,500
Augar Gorilla Drilla 4.5Hp Honda eng.	6,500
Air comp./Jackham. A/C Model Leroy 185 CFM J/H Model 40748T	6,500
Tractor/Loader J. Deere Model 2155 3/4yd front end ldr	8,000
Sod Cutter Ryan Jr. Model 644846-18 18" w/ trailer	2,200
Lawn Sweeper Toro RackOvac #07073	24,000
Trucks, Pickup(4) Chev. S-10 1/2 Tn, 2x4	40,000
Vans(2) Ford Model E40D V-8	46,000
Carryall(3) Chev. S-10 1/2 Tn, 2x4	81,000
Tractor(2) J. Deere Model 850 3 cyl. diesel	24,000
Tamper Wacker Model BS100Y	3,500
Trimmer(6) Toro Model TC-5000	1,200
Truck Dodge Mdl 7001 stake 1 1/2 ton	18,000
Backhoe(3) Case 760 w/Jackhammer	210,000

DENVER AREA—Continued

	Cost
	$ 856,400
Ft. Leavenworth N/C Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas:	
Van Chev. Suburban V2500 3/4 Ton, 9 pass	$ 12,000
Utility Vehicle Diahatsu Mdl. S81LP-LPT 4WD,Hyjet Lft.pac	10,000
Pickup Chev. 350 HD 2WD, auto trans.	8,000
Truck, Dump Chev. Mdl. Ck-31003 1 1/2Tn, 4x4	20,000
Tractor, Case Case Mdl. 485 50Hp w/15'batwing	20,000
Tractors (4) Massey-F. Mdl. 1030 25 Hp, w/72" mower	40,000
Sod Cutter Ryan Jr. 18"	1,000
Tamper Wacker Mdl. BS 60Y 6 cyl. gas 4Hp	1,500
Compressor Ingersoll Mdl. 135DIRL015 Gyro-flo	5,000
Trimmers (14) Jacobsen Mdl. J24 Fixed Line head	5,600
Utility Vehicle Diahatsu All terr Dumpbd	10,000
	$ 133,100
Ft. Scott N/C Fort Scott, Kansas:	
Truck, Dump Chev. Mdl.CK-31003 l.5Tn 4x4	$ 20,000
Sprayer Bean FMC Mdl. DMIOE200FEK 200gal	8,000
Tractor J.Deere lawn/gardern belly mnt mower	8,000
Weed eaters (4) Homelite Mdl. St-385 24cc gas	1,200
Lowering Device Berco w/ roller bar	3,000
	$ 40,200
National Memorial Cemetery of Arizona Phoenix, Arizona:	
Utility Vehicle Diahatsu Mdl. S81LP-LPT 4WD	$ 10,000
Tamper Mdl. BS60Y 4.2Hp, 2 cyc.	1,500
Sweeper American Lincoln Mdl. 2200 46Hp	10,500
Forklift Bobcat Mdl. 843	25,000
Mower Toro Mdl. 322-D 72"	11,000
	$ 58,000
National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific Honolulu, Hawaii:	
Tractor Kubota Mdl. L3750MR 8speed, 36HP	$ 22,000
Front End Loader Bobcat 843 Mdl. 656674 54 Hp, 60"Buck.	25,000
Sprayer	4,300
Mowers (2) Toro 322-D Mdl. 30788 Diesel, 72"	26,000
Sod Cutter Ryan Mdl. V212 24" cut width	3,700
Trailer, Dump Axis EZEE Mdl. C1193 Slf-cont. Hydraulic	5,000
Tamper Vibr. Rammer Mdl. BS60Y 4.2 Hp	2,400
Cleaner Gun flotsy Corp Mdl. 245 16Hp gas powr	1,800
	$ 90,200
San Jaoquin Valley Memorial Cemetery Gustine, California: (Under Construction)	
Mowers 72" Toro Grdmaster 322-D 72"front mount	$ 11,000
San Francisco N/C San Francisco, California:	
Tractor Kubota L2550 CST 4WD	$ 15,000
Van Astro-Van V-6. auto.	18,000
Utility Vehicle Dihiatsu 4WD w.dumpbed	10,000
	$ 43,000
Santa Fe N/C Santa Fe, New Mexico:	
Van Chev. 1/2 Tn,4x4, Auto.	$ 25,000
Truckster Kawasaki Mule 4x4 w/Hydra. dump	6,500
Tamper Wacker Mdl. BY45	2,000
Backhoe Case 590 Eng:Case4T-390	48,000
Spreader,Salt Meyer Mdl. 36000	1,100
Pack Wheel Mdl. PS 18S W/ Mounts	6,000
Sod Cutter Ryan 18" cut 4 cyc. 12 Hp	5,800
Jackhammer Merbia Mdl. Fb60 w/breaker kit	3,300
Lowering Device Master Mdl. 4901S Stainless Steel	2,100
	$ 99,800
Willamette N/C Portland, Oregon:	
Truck, Dump Mitsubishi FG4WD 2 yd. 4WD	24,000
Utility Vehicle Diahatsu Mdl. 58LP-TID Hijet Model	10,000

DENVER AREA—Continued

	Cost
Backhoe Ford Md. 2120 w/7190 fr.ldr w/Kelly B60	53,000
Trimmers (10) Green Mac.Mdl. 4000	5,000
Turf Vac J. Deere Mdl. 152	7,000
Shreader Royer Mdl. 300	48,000
Chipper Promark Mdl. CT-2	18,000
Tool Set Snap-on #8600BGSB #7400AGMBA	18,500
	$ 183,500
TOTAL DENVER AREA	$2,410,665

ATLANTA AREA

	Cost
Alexandria N/C Pineville, Louisiana:	
Mower, 52"	$ 8,500
Pressure Washer	2,400
Utility Truckster	9,000
Lowering Device	2,500
Trailer, Dump (2)	4,300
	$ 26,700
Barancas N/C Pensacola, Florida:	
Truck, 4x2 Compt	$ 12,000
Truck, 4x4 Compt	13,000
Mower, 50"	7,000
Utility Truckster	9,000
Aerator	2,000
Sod Cutter	2,300
Generator	1,700
Street Broom	2,700$ 49,700
Bay Pines N/C Bay Pines, Florida:	
Mower, Riding	$ 18,000
Truck, Van	13,000
Truck, Pickup	15,000
Generator	,500
	$ 46,500
Beaufort N/C Beaufort, South Carolina:	
Wood Chipper	$ 6,200
Tamper	3,000
Pickup, Dump Bed	4,500
Mower, 60"	11,000
Mower, 60"	11,000
Pressure Wash	2,200
	$ 37,900
Biloxi N/C Biloxi, Mississippi:	
Mower, Toro Groundmaster	$ 12,000
Truck, Pickup 1/2 Ton	13,000
	$ 25,000
Camp Nelson N/C Nicholasville, Kentucky:	
Sprayer	$ 900
Mower, 50"	12,000
Dump Bed	4,500
Truckster	11,000
Turf Vac	25,000
Van	14,500
Pressure Washer	3,000
Mower	,500
	$ 71,400
Chattanooga N/C Chattanooga, Tennessee:	
Van	$ 15,000
Mower, 72"	14,000
Aerator	2,000
Truckster(2)	22,000
Backhoe, 80Hp	55,000

ATLANTA AREA—Continued

	Cost
	$ 108,000
Corinth N/C Corinth, Mississippi:	
Pressure Washer	$ 7,200
Sweeper	2,800
Mower	,800
	$ 10,800
Fayetteville N/C Fayetteville, Arkansas:	
Mower, 60"	$ 9,500
Tractor	30,000
Truckster	11,000
	$ 50,500
Florence N/C Florence, South Carolina:	
Truckster (2)	$ 22,000
Florida N/C Bushnell, Florida:	
72" Mower (3)	$ 30,000
33" Mower	1,100
Pack Wheel	3,500
Two Way Radio (2)	3,600
	$ 38,200
Ft. Gibson N/C Ft. Gibson, Oklahoma:	
Mower	$ 12,000
Sweeper Attachment	3,300
Truckster, Utility	9,000
Pressure Washer	1,600
Truck, Dump	30,000
	$ 55,900
Ft. Mitchell N/C Seale, Alabama:	
Chain Hoist	$ 3,500
Ft. Sam Houston N/C San Antonio, Texas:	
Truck, Ford Ranger (2)	$ 22,000
Truckster	11,000
Truck, Crew cab	12,000
Radio System	18,000
Mower, 60"	18,000
Mower, 60"	18,000
Backhoe	35,000
Tamper	2,000
Truck, Crew cab	12,000
Truck, (2)	22,000
Truck, Van	12,500
Trailer, Dump	2,400
Skid Loader	25,000
Truck Van	12,500
Tractor (2)	25,000
Sprayer	4,500
Pack Wheel	3,500
Backhoe/Excavator Tractor	54,800
Mo Mats	15,000
Turf Vac	1,700
	$ 326,900
Ft. Smith N/C Ft. Smith, Arkansas:	
Pressure Washer	$ 5,900
Mower, 8 HP	1,600
	$ 7,500
Houston N/C Houston, Texas:	
Tractor (2)	$ 32,000
Backhoe	47,200
Tractor 4x4 45Hp	13,500
Truck, Minivan	14,900
Mower (2)	24,600
Mower, 72"	12,300
Trailer, Dump	3,800
Radio System	15,000
Truck, Dump	25,000
Truck, 4x4 Compact pickup	10,000
Fork lift, Bobcat	21,600
Curb Dressor	1,500
Tractor	13,500

ATLANTA AREA—Continued

	Cost
Steam Cleaner	5,800
	$ 240,700
Jefferson Barracks N/C St. Louis, Missouri:	
Mower, 72" Toro (3)	$ 36,000
Truck, Crew Cab	13,500
Truck, Stake	18,500
Truck, Carryall	13,500
Truck, Carryall	13,500
Truck, Cargo (2)	22,000
Truck, Cargo	11,500
Truck, Cargo	25,000
Truck, Dump	24,800
Lawn Sweeper	11,000
Utility Truckster	11,500
Utility Truckster	11,500
Sod Cutter	2,400
Tractor, JD 1050	12,000
Truck, Maintenance	12,000
Trailer, Dump	1,100
Tractor, Gardern Toro 30793	10,000
Tractor, Gardern Toro 30782	24,000
Streetsweeper	80,000
	$ 353,800
Knoxville N/C Knoxville, Tennessee:	
Mower, JDf915	
	$ 11,000
Port Hudson N/C Zachary, Louisiana:	
Mowers	$ 5,800
Truck, 1/2 Ton	12,000
Mini Van	18,000
	$ 35,800
Puerto Rico N/C Bayamon, Puerto Rico:	
Sprayer	$ 4,600
Spreader	2,000
Portable Generator	1,400
Rotary Broom	2,500
Aerator	2,400
	$ 12,900
Salisbury N/C Salisbury, North Carolina:	
Truck, 1/2 Ton Pickup	$ 9,000
Backhoe	40,000
Pressure Washer	4,700
Sod Cutter	2,500
Sweeper	7,800
	$ 64,000
Springfield N/C Springfield, Missouri:	
Pressure Washer	$ 4,700
Aerator	1,500
Vacuum Blower	1,000
Tractor	7,600
Utility Truckster	11,000
	$ 25,800
Zachary Taylor N/C Louisville, Kentucky:	
Pressure Washer	$ 5,900
TOTAL ATLANTA AREA	$1,867,700
Lebanon N/C Lebanon, Kentucky:	
Truck, Pickup, 4x4 Compact	$ 12,000
Mower, 60"	6,100
Pressure Washer	5,900
	$ 24,000
Little Rock N/C Little Rock, Arkansas:	
Truck, 2 1/2 Ton Dump	$ 28,000
Mower, 52"	5,700
Turf Vac	23,000

ATLANTA AREA—Continued

	Cost
	$ 56,700
Marietta N/C Marietta, Georgia:	
Backhoe	$ 35,000
Mower, Riding	8,500
Pressure Washer	6,000
Mower, Riding	12,000
	$ 61,500
Memphis N/C Memphis, Tennessee:	
Utility Truckster	$ 11,000
Sweeper	3,000
Sprayer	9,400
Steam Cleaner	2,100
	$ 25,500
Mountain Home N/C Mountain Home, Tennessee:	
Mower, 50" (2)	$ 18,000
Nashville N/C Madison, Tennessee:	
Mower	$ 8,000
Truckster	11,000
Pickup, 1/2 Ton	11,000
Truckster	21,000
	$ 51,000
Natchez N/C Natchez, Mississippi:	
Mower, Push (2)	$ 600

PHILADELPHIA AREA

	Cost
Baltimore N/C Baltimore, Maryland:	
Dump Truck GMC 4x4 150	$ 20,000
Internment Shelter Norvelle Ironlite 14x20	4,500
Pressure Washer Jenny 2210 S	3,000
Tractor Bolens 3214 M 14 HP	4,000
Snow Removal UnitToro 380 05 24"	1,800
Casket Carrier Frigid 1400	1,500
	$ 34,800
Bath N/C Bath, New York:	
Tractor, Lawn John Deere 2355 55HP 63 vor	$ 20,000
Bunton Mower, 52" Bunton B52-1685I/C 16HP	2,000
	$ 2,200
Beverly N/C Beverly, New Jersey:	
Mower Toro 220D 52"	$ 10,000
Tractorw trlr dump Kubota L 2050 F/DT 25 HP	12,500
Pruning system Maibo Manf. XOUE	5,100
	$ 27,600
Calverton N/C Calverton, New York:	
Dump Trk2 1/2 T (2) GMC C6D042 2 1/2 ton	$ 70,000
Truck, Pickup Chev. 3500 3/4 ton	12,000
Backhoe Ford 7500	60,000
Truck, Carryall Chevy C-20 3/4 ton	13,000
	$ 155,000
Culpeper N/C Culpeper, Virginia:	
Truck, 3/4 ton 4wd Dodge Ram 3/4 ton	$ 15,000
Utility vehicle Cushman Haulster 4589	10,000
Mower, 52" Toro 220-D	5,000
Mower, 48" Bolens 5018	4,800
	$ 34,800
Ft. Custer N/C Augusta, Michigan:	
Truck, Cargo van Dodge Ram 250 4x4 w o/d	$ 10,500
Truck,6 p. crew cab Dodge 250 4x4 w o/d	11,500
	$ 22,000
Hampton N/C Hampton, Virginia:	
Dump truck Ford F 700 6 CD 794	$ 26,500
Indiantown Gap N/C Annville, Pennsylvania:	
Tractor Toro 322-D 727	$ 10,000

PHILADELPHIA AREA—Continued

	Cost
Keokuk N/C Keokuk, Iowa:	
Backhoe John Deere 250 C 50HP	$ 34,600
Mower Bunton B32 L-11DIC 32"	1,700
Mower, Tractor Kubota G5200H 36"	4,400
	$ 40,700
Long Island N/C Long Island, New York:	
Backhoe Ford 535	$ 24,000
Truck, Dump International 1600 2 Ton	25,000
Truck Chevy 3x3 V8 350 8cy	11,200
Truck, van Dodge 318 1/2 Ton	7,700
Flower cart Cushman Truckster 2cy 18Hp	5,400
Tractor Ford 1000 23Hp	5,100
Truck, Pickup Ford F600 U8 2 1/2 Ton	22,200
Tractor Toro 322-D	9,400
	$ 110,000
Massachusetts N/C Bourne, Massachusetts:	
Burial Van Ford F350 1 1/2 Ton (Cab/Chassis only)	$ 34,000
Van, 4WD Dodge Ram 150 1/2 to 3/4 Ton	14,000
Groundmaster Toro 580-D 8	20,000
Utility Vehicle Polaris Big Boss 6x6	8,500
Dump Truck GMC C6D042 2 1/2 Ton	35,000
Groundmaster Toro 322-D 72"	9,400
Backhoe(with trade) John Deere 710	50,000
	$ 170,900
Quantico N/C Triangle, Virginia:	
Chev. Blazer Chev. C-10 Mid	$ 11,000
Mini Van Dodge Caravan Mid	8,000
Pickup Truck Dodge Dakato Mid	12,000
Tractor(2) Ford 2000	34,000
Sweeper	2,500
Truck, pickup 4wd Dodge Dakato Mid	11,000
Truck, 2 Ton GMC TC 62942 Large	26,000
Truck, stake body Chev. C-30 Full Size	16,000
Truck, Dump GMC MT 463 Large	35,000
Truck, Panel Chev. C-10 Full Size	11,000
Tractor Ford 2000	14,000
Truck, Van Dodge 150 Full Size	9,000
Backhoe Ford 755W/ext. dip	86,000
	$ 275,500
Camp Butler N/C Springfield, Illinois:	
Tamper Wacker B9622Y	$ 2,200
Tractor, backhoe Case 580K 4WD 82"	40,000
Truckster, bandit Cushman	8,500
Truck, cargo 1/2T Chevy 510 VS 4x4	12,500
Compressor Sabborn S51C22-8081	1,500
Trailer, dump Duckett N20 4x7 2YD	5,000
Trailer, utility Duckett 211 16'x54'x81"	2,000
	$ 71,700
Rock Island N/C Rock Island, Illinois:	
Utility Vehicle Cushman Truckster 18Hp	$ 8,500
Van Chevy G20 V8 31	12,000
Tractor Kubota B 8200 19Hp	7,000
	$ 27,500
West Virginia N/C Grafton, West Virginia:	
Truck, Dump Ford F350 2 cu. yds.	$ 26,000
Mower, Lawn 17Hp Toro 322 D 72"R	12,600
	$ 38,600
Wood N/C Milwaukee, Wisconsin:	
Mower, Lawn Tractor Toro 217-D 72" w/side disch.	$ 11,200
Sweeper, lawn Jacobsen 720 E 60", 14 Hp	6,400
	$ 17,600
Woodlawn N/C Elmira, New York:	
Sprayer, Gas FMC Corp Jim Bean 7H Sn60618	4,000
TOTAL PHILADELPHIA AREA	$1,069,400

Mr. STAGGERS. Mr. Paxon.

Mr. PAXON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I thank both of you for being here.

First of all, I am looking at a survey that this subcommittee conducted, the results of which are next to the Chairman. It is a rather extensive survey of all the cemeteries across the country. A couple of things come out from looking at the results of this survey.

First and foremost is the fact that the problems are not isolated. We don't have the graphic illustrations via pictures to depict these in other areas, but looking at the cold statistics, one can draw a picture of some real serious problems at a number of cemeteries across the country.

When I look at the results where we ask about specific maintenance needs, some of the top ratings were, across the country, sunken grave repair, building repair, mowing and trimming. Looking at that, one would say some of these are relatively routine maintenance, mowing and trimming, equipment repair, repairing lawn mowers, repairing tractors, and what have you. But it wasn't isolated in one area. If you look at the responses across the country, these were major concerns.

Then, in an open-ended question it was asked, what specific kind of things could be provided that would cause you to be able to quickly upgrade the condition of our cemeteries?

Two points struck me. First, across the country the results were consistent, and second, that they were in many ways relatively routine items. For example, equipment replacement. We are talking here about mowers and trimmers and things like that; grounds maintenance, again relating to mowing. Building maintenance and construction sounds like a big item, but in looking at the results, I have been told that in many cases this consisted of very simple things: building a storage shed to keep the tractor out of the rain, and that type of thing.

First of all, would you comment on whether or not you feel these are isolated, and second, looking at these kind of results, what officially do you plan to do to address these needs?

Mr. PRINCIPI. I believe that Riverside is really an aberration. I don't believe conditions such as we experienced at Riverside exist throughout our national cemeteries. Occasionally an act of God, a tornado, a hurricane will do extensive damage to a national cemetery, whether it be in Charleston or in San Francisco as a result of an earthquake. Those are going to happen. Magnificent homes fall off the sides of mountains in California when we get these torrential rains. I live in that area, so I know full well what could happen.

Yes, we do have problems throughout our system as a result of funding that has not kept pace. But I think by and large our cemeteries are places of honor and are well maintained given the current funding level.

What can we do to improve it? Funding is a big issue and it is one that we are committed to improving. We are looking at our central office staffing to see if some of the FTEE that are currently stationed in Washington can be relocated to the field to help in the operation and maintenance of our National Cemetery System.

I believe in purchasing good equipment. That makes the job easier. Currently we are spending an awful lot of man-hours trying to repair broken-down lawn mowers, hydroseeders, compactors, or we are leasing that equipment at enormous cost. If we make an investment up front, we can save the taxpayer lots of dollars over the long term and really improve the aesthetics of our national cemeteries.

So I think it's a combination of things. It is good management; it is articulating very vociferously the need for additional funding. I think we can overcome this problem.

I appreciate the frustration and the concern of this Committee and the motivation to transfer the National Cemetery System to the American Battle Monuments Commission. I urge you not to do so. I urge you to give us an opportunity to demonstrate our commitment to the cemetery system. We believe we are in the best position to maintain that cemetery system.

Mr. PAXON. Mr. Principi, let me just follow up. Have you seen the survey that this subcommittee conducted?

Mr. PRINCIPI. I have not, sir.

Mr. PAXON. I would like you to have the opportunity to take a look at it. It strikes me, looking across the board, across the country at the responses, the consistency of the responses in terms of the very serious problems. When you take a look at this and you find that sunken grave repair ranked as the number one concern at 11 cemeteries, number two concern at ten, number three concern at another ten, and so forth and so on, across the board, people are walking into these cemeteries and seeing the graves of their loved ones sunk. That is outrageous. I would urge you to take a look at it.

Something else you mentioned. You said that funding has not kept pace. It is my understanding, and correct me if I am wrong, that the DVA has transferred over the past few years funds from the cemeteries to GOE accounts. Is that correct?

Mr. PRINCIPI. Part of the problem is that the cemetery system is in the GOE account and the GOE account is a relatively small account that funds a vast array of programs: the Veterans Benefits Administration, our compensation and pension programs, loan guarantee, education, insurance, cemeteries, all our staff offices, meeting the requirements of the Chief Financial Officers Act; our inspector general—all come out that account. So we have had to move dollars around, but we have tried to protect the National Cemetery System as best we can. In other accounts we have flaws on personnel. Veterans Benefits Administration has to be funded at a certain level.

It has been tough to juggle those dollars in the GOE account, and that is where the cemetery system lies, sir.

Mr. PAXON. But there are lines in that account relating to cemeteries and there are funds that have been moved from those lines the past couple of years?

Ms. WEBB. Yes. You are correct. Last year we took a $1.6 million reduction.

Mr. PRINCIPI. One point two.

Ms. WEBB. We will get the exact figure for you.

(Subsequently, the Department of Veterans Affairs submitted the following information:)

In fiscal year 1991, the National Cemetery System incurred a reduction of $1,261,000.

Mr. PRINCIPI. That was the result of the overall funding level for the GOE account.

Mr. PAXON. Last question. What kind of an allocation would it take to retire the backlog and move us ahead?

Mr. PRINCIPI. We could retire the backlog with $8 million. Although we have received $3 million, I have a reprogramming letter on my desk to come up as a result of this supplement, and we have taken steps to eliminate this $1 million payment that the cemetery system makes annually to the medical administration. We are going to eliminate that. Our medical side is going to continue to support our cemeteries but they are not going to be charging the cemetery system $1 million a year.

So we are taking small steps, but approximately $8.3 million is the current backlog, and that is what it would take to eliminate the backlog completely.

Mr. PAXON. I believe my time has expired.

Mr. STAGGERS. Mr. Nichols.

Mr. NICHOLS. Mr. Chairman, I guess I am still concerned about these photographs. I think we all are. You have these photographs.

Mr. PRINCIPI. Yes, I do.

Mr. NICHOLS. Your analysis of the cause of conditions that show in these graphically portrayed photographs would be, first of all, lack of funds, would you say?

Mr. PRINCIPI. Lack of funding to adequately prepare the soil, compact it properly, get the hydroseed down, and then continue to water the seed so that it would germinate. I think that is just part of the problem, sir.

Another part of the problem is the large interment rate in phase 3 of that cemetery, 150 burials a week in that area, a drought condition for 5 years, as you know, in California, and then during the month of March 11 inches of rain. That combination of factors caused those conditions.

Again, the cemetery today is not as depicted in those photographs. The cemetery today is as I show here and we will submit for the record. Jo Ann's people have done a marvelous job. Within 2 days they had a contract let, which is unheard of in a large bureaucracy like the VA. Although we had some rains during that period of time and we had to stop work, we gave them 30 days to repair that entire mess that you see, and they have. They have done a marvelous job, so that by Memorial Day that cemetery will look beautiful.

We will submit the photos for the record.

Ms. WEBB. The repairs came to $300,000. By Wednesday of next week the contractor will be finished. We have also been fortunate that we have had some rain and some of the areas that were weedy and sort of spotty with grass are now looking rather lush.

I would say the situation has been greatly improved.

Mr. NICHOLS. Where did that money come from?

Ms. WEBB. It came from emergency funding. There is a special account in the Office of Facilities from which we can use funds for extraordinary circumstances.

Mr. NICHOLS. Not from any other cemeteries?

Ms. WEBB. No, those did not come from other cemeteries.

Mr. NICHOLS. One other concern about these photographs is the fact that in these, of course, you see tire tracks with kind of irregular patterns, sometimes going by the graves. That makes me question what they would be doing. Would that be maintenance? Would it be an attitude of pride on the part of the local managers or superintendent of the cemetery?

I come from admittedly a small community where we don't bury 30 people a day. By the same token, the location of these tire tracks looks like it could be just a pride factor perhaps in the overall maintenance of this cemetery that we value so much.

Ms. WEBB. I am sorry to admit, sir, but you are correct in that there was a failing on the part of the maintenance crew. Graves that were normally closed at the end of the day were not properly raked and taken care of. But again, this is an indication of the funding situation there and the FTE ratio, which is not at the level it should be to handle the volumes of interments that you have there. That situation has been corrected.

Mr. NICHOLS. These look like two-wheeled tire tracks as well as some circular maintenance caused by seeding or something, but kind of an irregular pattern that normally wouldn't take place when somebody is cultivating or planting.

Ms. WEBB. There was an effort to compact the graves by using heavy machinery. When that action is completed the next step is to rake those graves to remove those tire tracks, and unfortunately, in those photographs that was not done.

Mr. NICHOLS. You can imagine, of course, how heartsick a widow would be when she goes out to see something like that.

Mr. PRINCIPI. No question. I was sick when I saw it.

Mr. NICHOLS. I had trouble understanding the first Congressman. He is admittedly concerned about this, saying it was a problem of seeding, but it would look like a problem of much more than seeding to me, because even when you seed, soil doesn't settle like this and go down in a sunken grave condition.

Thank you. I appreciate your being here today to talk on this very delicate matter.

Mr. PRINCIPI. Thank you, Mr. Nichols.

Mr. STAGGERS. A response to one of Mr. Paxon's questions sort of stimulated another thought. Why not move the cemetery budget out of the GOE? That would obviously help this situation.

Mr. PRINCIPI. I think that needs to be explored, Mr. Staggers. I would have to take a look at that whole GOE account. Maybe that is the answer. I would like to work with you and the staff and see if we can take a look at that to see if that makes sense. The appropriations committees, of course, would play a big role in that issue as well.

Mr. STAGGERS. I would like to work with you on that.

We are going to be at San Joaquin. Is there money to open that cemetery?

Ms. WEBB. San Joaquin is 50 percent completed. However, there is no money in the 1992 budget to open that cemetery. So we have delayed that to 1993. The cost of that would be $2 million for approximately 18 FTE.

Mr. PRINCIPI. And that was due in part to a funding priority as well at the time there was a concern about whether we would even be able to get a water permit for sanitation let alone watering of the graves. At the time, the California Water Authority was denying us a permit for watering. We had a temporary permit that the contractor had to water during the course of the developing of the cemetery. So those two factors led us to hold off until fiscal year 1993.

Mr. STAGGERS. In closing, I just want to stress to the VA that you all need to be advocates in all aspects with the veterans. You talked earlier and I commented about blame. I would feel much better if you were advocating larger budgets and we were cutting them back because of the national needs. Don't shortchange us. If we have to start with your budget and then we cut it, that makes the problem even worse. I would love to work with you and to continue to try to solve not only this problem, but other problems with the VA.

Mr. PRINCIPI. We have been able to do that, Mr. Staggers. I would certainly be happy to do so here.

Mr. STAGGERS. Obviously the answer is not going to be keeping information from us. Please feel free.

I guess the last question I would ask is one of those open-ended questions. We will let you go wherever you want to with it. Is there anything that either one of you would like to add for the record?

Mr. PRINCIPI. No. I have nothing further to add, Mr. Staggers. I appreciate the courtesy with which we have been treated. I can appreciate the concerns you have for the National Cemetery System. I just want you to know that we share the same concerns. That's about it.

Mr. STAGGERS. Ms. Webb.

Ms. WEBB. I also appreciate the concern of this committee and the courtesies that have been extended to me as the director by you and by your staff. I have enjoyed the working relationship. But I would also like to emphasize that the conditions that you see are not an indictment of the 1200 dedicated people who serve the system.

Mr. STAGGERS. We will miss you and your advocacy for the cemetery system.

Any other questions?

[No response.]

I thank the panel.

Mr. PRINCIPI. Thank you.

Mr. STAGGERS. The next panel will be Steven Dola accompanied by John Metzler. We appreciate you all being with us. However you want to proceed.

STATEMENT OF STEVEN DOLA, DEPUTY FOR MANAGEMENT AND BUDGET, OFFICE OF ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF THE ARMY (CIVIL WORKS), DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY, ACCOMPANIED BY JOHN C. METZLER, JR., SUPERINTENDENT, ARLINGTON NATIONAL CEMETERY

Mr. DOLA. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. We would like to submit our complete statement for the record and summarize it, if that is okay.

Mr. STAGGERS. Without objection. I hear no objection. So ordered.

Mr. DOLA. Mr. Chairman, I am pleased to be testifying before this subcommittee today on the operation of Arlington National Cemetery. With me is Mr. John C. Metzler, Jr., Superintendent of Arlington National Cemetery. Mr. Metzler became superintendent on January 14, 1991. We are appearing on behalf of the secretary of the Army, who is responsible for the operation and maintenance of Arlington and Soldiers' and Airmen's Home National Cemeteries.

The budget request for fiscal year 1992 is $12,587,000. The funds requested will finance operations at Arlington and Soldiers' and Airmen's Home National Cemeteries.

Construction funds in the amount of $4.8 million are included in the budget for a major project at Arlington, the repair of rainwater leaks at the Memorial Amphitheater.

From its origin during the Civil War, Arlington National Cemetery has become this Nation's principal shrine to honor the men and women who served in the armed forces. In addition to the thousands of funerals with military honors held there each year, hundreds of non-funeral ceremonies are conducted to honor those who rest in the cemetery.

There has been no recent change, Mr. Chairman, in the interment eligibility criteria for Arlington National Cemetery. In addition to several categories of decedent who are eligible for interment, such as members of the armed forces who die on active duty, any honorably discharged veteran whose remains have been cremated is eligible for inurnment in the Arlington National Cemetery columbarium.

In fiscal year 1990 there were 3075 interments and 1345 inurnments; and 3225 interments and 1425 inurnments are estimated in fiscal year 1991. It is noted in this regard, Mr. Chairman, that Arlington National Cemetery became the final resting place for 15 American service members and one civilian who lost their lives in the Middle East during Operation Desert Storm.

The fiscal year 1992 budget request, as I just indicated, includes $4.8 million for final design and repair of rainwater leaks at the Memorial Amphitheater. This renovation will take care of all water and moisture related problems that are causing accelerated deterioration of the marble cladding and damage to the interior finishes of the amphitheater. Repairs are scheduled to begin in the fall of 1992 and to be completed in late spring of 1994.

Public Law 100-322 authorizes the secretary of the Army to provide graveliners for graves in Arlington National Cemetery. Engineering cost effectiveness studies performed for the Veterans' Administration indicated that in cemeteries where burials exceed 500

to 600 per year it appears reasonable to use graveliners. We will consider during formulation of the 1993 budget including funds for an evaluation of the specific circumstances in Arlington National Cemetery.

Public Law 101-237 requires the secretary of the Army to designate an appropriate area within Arlington National Cemetery for the unmarked interment of ashes. The Army is committed to implementing this provision, and we anticipate conducting a concept design and feasibility study to evaluate the alternatives.

This completes my statement, Mr. Chairman.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Dola appears on p. 86.]

Mr. STAGGERS. Thank you for your statement.

You have stated that there is no recent change in the interment eligibility criteria. Since it is more restrictive than most national cemeteries, have you considered eliminating or at least reviewing the restrictive criteria?

Mr. DOLA. We certainly haven't considered eliminating them. The criteria are constantly under review, but we have no plans immediately to make a change, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. STAGGERS. Since it is scheduled to be closed in 2025, are you working on future expansion plans?

Mr. DOLA. Mr. Chairman, we don't have a specific proposal to offer to you, but I would like to ask the superintendent to address this matter. Since coming on board, he has attempted to become familiar with our neighbors who may some day make it possible for us to expand.

Would you like to comment?

Mr. METZLER. Good morning, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. STAGGERS. Good morning.

Mr. METZLER. Since I have become the superintendent of Arlington National Cemetery I have had the opportunity to go around the perimeter of our cemetery and meet with our neighbors in the Department of the Interior, the Marine Corps and the Navy, just to introduce myself, to let them know of our concerns of Arlington and its future years of closing the cemetery in 2025, and what their plans may be for the future use of their land that they are currently in charge of.

At this point we don't have any commitment from anybody, but I am continuing to look at the cemetery, especially at the Department of the Interior, which has some land within Arlington under their control, to try to plan for the out years, to look at how we could possibly integrate Arlington back into this land. So we are very well aware of the situation.

We are also looking at the interment sections within Arlington to be sure that every available grave within those sections has been surveyed, and where we can pick up additional gravesites within the existing sections, we are doing that now.

Mr. STAGGERS. I am sure as you went around and introduced yourself that you weren't that totally unfamiliar since your father preceded you as superintendent. I do appreciate that you informed us that you are working with your neighbors.

Another question with the budget. You talked about your 1992 request. I don't know whether you listened to some of the other testimony. Can you tell us what you originally submitted?

Mr. DOLA. Mr. Chairman, we did listen very carefully to the other testimony. In the case of Arlington National Cemetery, the cemeterial expenses in the Department of the Army budget that we submitted to OMB, actually in 1992 the request that we submitted was less than we got. We got some several hundred thousand dollars more than we asked for.

Mr. Chairman, I mentioned the repair of the Memorial Amphitheater leaks. We submitted a request that was several hundred thousand dollars above the planning ceiling that we had for 1992. So we feel that our request has been fairly and appropriately disposed of by the Office of Management and Budget.

Mr. STAGGERS. Is there money enough to fully repair the leaks?

Mr. DOLA. It is our belief, based on the studies done at this time, that there certainly is. There is a much more extensive leak situation and repair and renovation necessary than originally thought. We believe we have a good estimate.

Mr. STAGGERS. Will the amphitheater be closed during the repairs?

Mr. DOLA. There will be portions closed. Mr. Metzler has made plans to assure that important ceremonies such as changing of the guard do in fact continue.

Would you care to comment further?

Mr. METZLER. The display room will have to be closed during the renovation period. We have already worked with the ceremonial people at the Military District of Washington to be sure that the guard changing will continue to occur. We may have to move down to a lower portion on the plaza area. During the main part of the renovation we will be able to continue operations as normal with some modifications. During Memorial Day and Veterans Day we will have to see where we are in construction.

In our early planning meetings with the AE and the Corps of Engineers we have expressed this concern, that we want to try to have this available if at all possible for these very special observances.

Mr. STAGGERS. At our last hearing you indicated that you would request graveliners in your 1992 budget and you stated for 1993 you will request funds to do an evaluation of whether graveliners will be cost effective. You stated the VA study indicated that there are cost effective measures using the graveliners in cemeteries where burials exceed 500 to 600 burials per year. You have over 3000. That would seem justification enough. Are you going the next step and what can we do to help?

Mr. DOLA. I appreciate that question, Mr. Chairman. I will let Mr. Metzler comment in a moment.

Certainly it has been our position that graveliners make sense. The studies indicate it. The studies also indicate that the particular circumstances apply, the particular soil conditions, environmental conditions, weather conditions, the nature of the work force, all need to be evaluated at site-specific cemeteries. So we are taking that extra, cautious step to make sure that, when we come before OMB and ultimately Congress and ask for a commitment of perhaps $2 million for a 10-year period, we have touched every base and made every analysis.

Would you care to add?

Mr. METZLER. I had quite a bit of experience with graveliners in my previous employment with the Veterans' Administration, running Calverton National Cemetery. I am a real supporter of graveliners. They work. They help. They make the appearance of the ground extremely compatible with what we are trying to do in the National Cemetery System. Certainly in Arlington we want that to happen.

As Mr. Dola has said, we want to do these surveys to be sure that at Arlington we have the right soil conditions and that we can bring the cost for a graveliner contract in at a reasonable price. We need to have some updated figures for this current operating period.

Mr. STAGGERS. Mr. Dola, you mentioned Public Law 101-237. Can you give us a time frame as to when the designated area will be accomplished?

Mr. DOLA. Let me say this, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Metzler has attended to this task with great energy and dispatch, he has really been working on this. I am hopeful that the time frame will be sooner than my statement that I submitted for the record would imply.

Would you please summarize for the Chairman the activities that you have engaged in most recently?

Mr. METZLER. One of the items that Mr. Costanzo left me was a list of things to do, and that was on the list. We looked very quickly into the cemetery to available sites as well as the original site that was proposed. I felt that I would like to explore the cemetery a little bit further before I made a commitment as to one site specific.

We have looked at five sites now within Arlington and we have visited out at the Falls Church Episcopal Church, where this concept originally took place, with Congressman Bennett. I have been in contact with Congressman Bennett's office and with the secretary of the Army's office and I have a proposal now that I would like to share with each of these two offices.

I would hope within the next month that meetings are going to be scheduled and we bring both concerned parties out there and show them Arlington Cemetery, show them the proposed sites, and if everything is acceptable, we will be moving very quickly this fiscal year to start the process.

Mr. STAGGERS. I appreciate your answer.

If there are no further questions from any other members, I appreciate the panel being with us. There may be additional questions for the record.

Mr. DOLA. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. STAGGERS. The next panel will be some of the veterans groups, Rick Schneider, Frank Buxton, Bob Manhan, Bruce Burgess, and Clifton Dupree.

I also understand that Rick Heilman of the DAV will be introducing Bruce Burgess.

Mr. Heilman, if we can get the introduction out of the way, we will start with Mr. Burgess.

Mr. HEILMAN. Thank you for this courtesy, Mr. Chairman. Bruce Burgess joined my staff in January of this year. Prior to that time he had worked in the field for the DAV, for the past 7 years, as one

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of our national service officers. He started in our claims office in Houston, Texas, and also San Antonio, Texas, and has a great deal of expertise, Mr. Chairman, in Title 38 USC, interfacing with VA claimants and the VA in the area of special disability compensation claims.

He has also had a lot of experience representing veterans before the Physical Evaluation Boards for Air Force Personnel and Army Personnel and also Social Security claimants for disability claims before that agency.

Mr. Burgess is a Vietnam veteran. He served in Vietnam with the 173rd Airborne Brigade. Just short of the end of his first combat tour in Vietnam he was wounded in action and retired on disability with the rank of captain.

We are pleased that he is a member of our staff here in Washington, DC. We trust that his future contributions and relationship with you, Mr. Chairman, will prove beneficial to your Committee.

Thank you for this courtesy.

Mr. STAGGERS. Thank you, Mr. Heilman.

Mr. Burgess, we will start with you.

STATEMENT OF BRUCE W. BURGESS, ASSOCIATE NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE DIRECTOR, DISABLED AMERICAN VETERANS

Mr. BURGESS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. If there are no objections, I am prepared to submit my formal testimony for the record and to summarize it in oral remarks for the subcommittee.

Mr. STAGGERS. There are no objections. So ordered. Your testimony will be included in the record.

Mr. BURGESS. Thank you, sir.

On behalf of the more than 1.3 million members of the Disabled American Veterans and its Ladies' Auxiliary, I thank you for this opportunity to express our views as part of your oversight of the Department of Veterans Affairs National Cemetery System, in particular its operational needs now in view of the existing fiscal restraints.

Mr. Chairman, the DAV applauds you and your continued interest in the VA National Cemetery System to ensure that the ultimate benefit earned by the former members of our armed forces remains available for all those who choose to have this meaningful interment of their mortal remains.

Your subcommittee is considering the possibility of expanding eligibility for interment in the National Cemetery System to selected reservists with 20 years of service. It is also considering turning the operations of the NCS over to the American Battle Monuments Commission.

At our most recent National Convention, the DAV passed no resolutions concerning either of these matters. Therefore, we have no position concerning these issues. However, Mr. Chairman, our last convention did pass a resolution calling for at least one open national cemetery in each State to ensure that all veterans may be buried in a national cemetery reasonably close to their homes.

Mr. Chairman, last year began with a veteran population of over 28 million, but more than 464,000 died. However, of those 464,000, only about 61,000 were interred in the National Cemetery System.

We feel that if only one out of seven veterans choose the National Cemetery System as their final resting place, then perhaps the NCS is not truly providing for the needs of our Nation's veterans. We feel the formula for picking locations of national cemeteries needs adjusting, especially since the peak demands at our National Cemetery System will soon be occurring.

Mr. Chairman, the past few years of straight line or no real growth budgets have occurred while the usage of the National Cemetery System has been increasing dramatically. From fiscal year 1984 to fiscal year 1992 interments and gravesite maintenance workloads will have increased by 36.1 percent and 24 .8 percent respectively while the wage grade FTEE will have declined 5.4 percent during the same period. It should have increased, not decreased.

We also have an $8.4 million major equipment backlog and $1.2 million in deferred maintenance and repairs.

Mr. Chairman, we note the increased use of volunteer hours and work done by the Boy Scout troops and other groups to attempt to help out in the cemeteries. In fact, the DAV is responding to a VA request and is in the process of contacting each DAV state commander to see if donations can be found to pay for some of the backhoes, casket carriers, trucks, and other pieces of equipment needed by our national cemeteries.

However, Mr. Chairman, what has the government of the most powerful Nation in the world come to when we must rely on children and donated time and money to buy the equipment that will be needed to accord veterans a proper burial and maintain their graves? Of all the rights that our veterans have earned, surely the right to a decent burial and proper care of their remains is something this government can well afford.

The Independent Budget recommends an $18.4 million increase above the fiscal year 1991 appropriated level. This should go a long way toward clearing the entire equipment backlog as well as most deferred maintenance items and allow for additional FTEE.

Mr. Chairman, the results of the past budget deficits are most painfully evident in the 20-acre section of the Riverside, California, cemetery that you described as looking like a "bomb scarred battlefield." Mr. Chairman, we too have viewed the color photographs of Riverside National Cemetery. Frankly, the color we see is red. One cannot help but get angry. While gazing on this grassless cemetery that is pockmarked by small craters produced by shifting, sinking earth, highlighted by exposed grave markers that are all but disappearing into a chasm of red mud, our stomachs turned and our minds reeled. These conditions are truly shameful.

How did this happen? We understand it is because the VA could not afford to repair the equipment used to prepare the earth properly following each interment, nor was there money to fertilize, weed, water, and generally maintain the gravesites.

Whatever the cause, we cannot allow our national cemeteries to resemble a potter's field. The National Cemetery System should be the crown jewel of the VA. These cemeteries will live on in perpetuity as a lasting sign of a grateful Nation's final gift to those who served her so well. Let us strive to make sure this jewel will forever shine like the precious diamond it should be.

That concludes my testimony, Mr. Chairman. I will be pleased to respond at the appropriate time to any questions that you or any of your subcommittee members may have.

Mr. STAGGERS. Thank you, Mr. Burgess.

Mr. Schneider.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Burgess appears on p. 90.]

STATEMENT OF RICHARD C. SCHNEIDER, DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS, NON COMMISSIONED OFFICERS ASSOCIATION OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It is a pleasure to represent the Non Commissioned Officers Association here today. We know you hold these hearings every year and we are grateful that you do. We are grateful that you provide the opportunity for us to come and express our views.

We agree with your comments that you made when you introduced this session today. We agree entirely. The problem is money—The problem is money.

If we look back only 10 years ago at the VA and the National Cemetery System, you would have seen a system that was a star; it was the crown; it was the front piece of the VA program; it was the immaculate evolution of a system that came to fruition. Unfortunately, in the last 10 years funding has declined. I guess you just don't give money to something that looks so good. You look at other areas where you think the need is greater. It is that taking away of the small bits, the small chunks that eventually leads you to a question of operations, a question of maintenance, a question of Riverside in California.

We recognize the independent budget that was done. In that budget it showed the shortfall, and it showed it in maintenance and it showed it in operations. We look at that and we say, you can't run a cemetery system without the equipment that you need. Yet the budget for the last 2 years has failed to adequately provide the resources that have been needed across this country—not just Riverside, across this country—to maintain the quality and standards that the National Cemetery System should have.

Should the NCS be transferred to the Battle Monuments Commission? We say no. We say absolutely not! It ought to be retained within "the Veterans' Administration." It ought to be funded at the level to bring it back to where it should be. It ought to be the enhanced showplace for this country's veterans.

When you ask what other problems exist, we look at siting; we look at the numbers of veterans that are being buried. It has been described this morning by the gentleman from New Hampshire. It has been described by Mr. Burgess. People don't want to go to church on Sunday morning and drive 300 miles to visit their loved ones that afternoon. They can't do it.

We looked at the regional cemetery system that was implemented and we saw that the director of the cemetery system herself had stated that they are not serving multistate areas. As a matter of fact, in the States in which they are located they are not even serving the entire populations of those States, because people won't travel a long distance to those cemeteries to inter their loved ones.

I'm a veteran. I wouldn't bury my spouse 300 miles, 200 miles, 100 miles. I would want her close. That feeling is reflected across this country by veterans. Not only by the veterans, but by the veterans' spouses. They want access along with their children to the gravesites. When they go to those national cemeteries they want to go quick and close.

In 1987 we talked about a program that would regionalize and bring in ten more cemeteries. As a matter of fact, this august group even funded additional impact statements for other locations that were not proposed. Nothing has happened. We really have not seen what this Committee had asked for, what this Congress had asked for. The impact statements went into that dark hole called OMB, and I don't believe those statements ever came out. We have never seen them; we know you haven't seen them; none of America's veterans have seen them.

It is time we looked at the policy. If the limiting factor for OMB is that the expansion program is not part of the official policy, then we need to have the VA or this Congress come on line and define what the policy should be, so that when studies are done, when funds are expended we get the results of the studies and we have that information to work with as we determine what should occur within the cemetery system, how it should be expanded.

And it should be expanded. We know that expansion would provide cemeteries that are close enough for people to want to bury their loved ones and provide the final resting place for this Nation's heroes.

I would like to make two additional comments.

There are many facilities available and coming available as a result of base closings. We looked at Presidio; we looked at Fort Sheridan. While they are not on the VA cemetery list, they ought to be. They are in metropolitan areas. They could serve a dense population and they could benefit our country. We have proposed those locations under our other comments.

We do not support transfer of the NCS out of the VA. The VA has taken good care of veterans. We applaud them and the work they have done, recognizing the limited resources that they have had to work with. We admire the secretary and his statement that there should be a resting place within 75 miles of a veteran's home. We need to expand. We need to do it smartly. We appreciate your lead, the lead of this Committee to make sure that it happens.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. STAGGERS. Mr. Buxton.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Schneider appears on p. 98.]

STATEMENT OF FRANK C. BUXTON, DEPUTY DIRECTOR, NATIONAL VETERANS AFFAIRS AND REHABILITATION COMMISSION, THE AMERICAN LEGION

Mr. BUXTON. Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee, the American Legion welcomes this opportunity to provide its views on programs conducted by the Department of Veterans Affairs in relation to the National Cemetery System.

A comprehensive statement has been submitted for inclusion in the record. We will therefore limit our remarks this morning to the salient portions of the testimony.

Mr. Chairman, several months ago the American Legion was contacted by a distraught veteran that most of you know now as Mr. Keene from California, who was very distressed over the condition of his wife's gravesite at Riverside National Cemetery. The photos he sent us depicted muddy ruts for roadways, sunken, water filled graves and grave markers which had been run down by heavy machinery. It was an appalling site and it was a disgrace to our Nation's veterans.

The response from the NCS was that severe drought followed by torrential rains had made portions of the cemetery impossible to maintain with the resources they had at hand. Mr. Chairman, these were merely symptoms of a longstanding underlying disease, and that disease is underfunding of the National Cemetery System.

The system remains committed to providing dignified burials and proper perpetual care to the gravesites under their guardianship. However, without a substantial increase in funding for operations, equipment and personnel these symptoms exhibited at Riverside, the lack of equipment for proper gravesite tamping, the lack of proper grading and seeding because of limited funds, could seemingly spread to other cemetery locations.

Mr. Chairman, both the House and the Senate Veterans' Affairs committees have suggested allocations of up to $20 million to keep the National Cemetery System from further deterioration. This one-time boost would allow the system to return to normalcy after years of underfunding.

Mr. Chairman, there are insufficient funds allocated to properly operate the new national cemetery in Arizona. The new San Joaquin Valley National Cemetery in Northern California will have its 1991 Veterans Day opening delayed by 1 year.

The American Legion urgently requests that the funding of the VA's National Cemetery System be reviewed with an eye towards adequate allocation.

During 1990 the VA had 62,000 interments and over 70,000 are expected yearly by 1995. The process of expansion of the system must proceed.

Mr. Chairman, the 1990 Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act has impacted on other after-death benefits for veterans. The American Legion does not support legislation which has reduced the eligibility for burial and plot allowances or to restrict eligibility for government furnished headstones.

In regard to the transfer of the NCS to the American Battle Monuments Commission, the American Legion opposes such a move as impractical and inefficient. The National Cemetery System and the American Battle Monuments Commission have entirely different missions. In many cases the National Cemetery System receives administrative, fiscal and logistical support from VA medical centers. Such support would be complicated if the cemeteries were to be transferred.

Mr. Chairman, no organizational change would be required if the VA and the Administration would simply request adequate resource support.

In addition, we strongly recommend that Congress establish a separate appropriation for the operation and maintenance of the national cemeteries rather than combining such funding with the general operating expenses of the VA. This would provide clear visibility and control over the funds specifically allocated for the National Cemetery System similar to that of the Department of the Army's account entitled "Cemetery Expenses," which supports the Arlington National Cemetery.

Mr. Chairman, the American Legion supports continued participation in the State cemetery grants program. This program maintains nearly 400,000 gravesite on 432 acres with 1500 additional acres available for interment in complement to the National Cemetery System.

Mr. Chairman, burial benefits are often the only benefits for which many veterans approach the system. We need to make certain that these last benefits are provided in a manner befitting their sacrifices for their country.

Mr. Chairman, that concludes our statement.

Mr. STAGGERS. I appreciate the statement.

Mr. Manhan.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Buxton appears on p. 103.]

STATEMENT OF BOB MANHAN, SPECIAL ASSISTANT, NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE SERVICE, VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS OF THE UNITED STATES

Mr. MANHAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It is my pleasure to represent the Veterans of Foreign Wars. Our 2,900,000 members, which include about 70,000 members of our Ladies Auxiliary, all have entitlement to be interred within the National Cemetery System. Therefore, we have a vested interest in the hearing today.

I will briefly summarize our responses to the three principal questions we elected to answer.

First, what are the operational requirements of the National Cemetery System?

Second, what do we think about transferring the operational control of the National Cemetery System to the American Battle Monuments Commission?

Last, is it a good idea to create a burial eligibility for members of the Selected Reserve.

Briefly stated, the significant resource that the National Cemetery System needs from Congress, of course, is money. If they get enough money, they can turn that into people, into equipment improved management, and the job gets done.

I shan't belabor everything that Under Secretary Principi already said, but we think that given the resources that the VA's Department of Memorial Affairs has had to spend just on the National Cemetery System for the last 4 years—I am going back to 1989 and projecting to fiscal year 1992—they have done an adequate job.

The second point is to consider the feasibility of allowing the monument commission the option of running the National Cemetery System. Briefly stated, the monument commission has had some of the very same problems, on a much smaller scale, than the National Cemetery System presently faces. That is, a lack of re-

sources. The monuments commission has historically had to divert money from equipment and from maintenance to their personnel account.

Also, the monuments commission is in the unique, perhaps unenviable position, of having their key billets to include the secretary of the monuments commission staffed by active duty military officers, to include a general officer for the secretary. All of these billets or spaces happen to come from the Department of the Army. We know that 12 years ago the Department of Defense said they would no longer fill the billets. The Department of Defense has done so, but with the reduction in forces facing all the uniformed services there will be a managerial problem we foresee for the monuments commission. Based on that rationale, we don't think it would be a good idea to turn over the control of the cemetery system to the monuments commission.

The last interesting question you asked was how about extending or creating a burial eligibility right to members of the Selected Reserve who would gain their eligibility only for length of service, as I understand it. That is, those men and women who would be in the Selected Reserve unit for 20 continuous years, then retire, and at some time in the future be eligible for a full-time veteran benefit that we now enjoy.

The VFW does not wish at this time to extend that benefit. However, any Selected Reservist who has served a tour of active duty—and we have had a great number of them participate in the Persian Gulf crisis—have already earned this burial entitlement. But is only for that category of Selected Reservists who will join a reserve unit for 20 years and never have participated for a full tour of active duty, that we would not like to have the entitlement to be buried in the National Cemetery System.

This summarizes our position. I will be very happy to respond to any questions you may have. Thank you.

Mr. STAGGERS. Thank you.

Our next witness will be Mr. Dupree.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Manhan appears on p. 107.]

STATEMENT OF CLIFTON E. DUPREE, ASSOCIATE LEGISLATIVE DIRECTOR, PARALYZED VETERANS OF AMERICA

Mr. DUPREE. Good morning, sir. We would like to submit our statement for the record and I will summarize our statement.

Mr. STAGGERS. Without objection, your statement will be made part of the record.

Mr. DUPREE. Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee, it is a pleasure and personal privilege to appear today on behalf of the Paralyzed Veterans of America. PVA appreciates this opportunity to present our views concerning Department of Veterans Affairs' National Cemetery System.

A rapidly aging veteran population calls for expansion and improvement of the Department of Veterans Affairs' National Cemetery System. For over 200 years this Nation has provided suitable final resting places for the men and women who have served in our armed forces. This tradition must be protected and continued. To

do otherwise would be to break a longstanding national commitment and demean the sacrifices of our veterans.

In response to two specific legislative proposals contained in your letter of invitation, PVA opposed transferring of the operations of the National Cemetery System to the American Battle Monuments Commission. The operations and management of the National Cemetery System really has not been a problem. The problem is lack of appropriate funding support for the NCS. Transferring the NCS to the American Battle Monuments Commission would not change the funding needs requirement to keep the National Cemetery System operational.

However, we do support the proposal to create a burial eligibility to members of the Selected Reserve who have served at least 20 years provided they have served on active duty. Veterans who have served on active duty should still have priority for burial.

The Administration requested a budget authority of $57.3 million for fiscal year 1992 and the submission was to provide resources which address the critical maintenance and repair project needs for maintaining the National Cemetery System's approximately 400 buildings and 100 miles of roads. It also is being programmed to provide for the partial replacement of essential operational equipment.

PVA also continues to advocate for the location of a DVA cemetery in every State and a national cemetery within reasonable driving distance of every major metropolitan area.

Of the 113 cemeteries which are included in the National Cemetery System, located in 39 States, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, 36 are either closed or will be closed to new interments by the end of 1991 due to lack of space. The need for a significant increase in available and accessible gravesites is obvious.

I am going to kind of deviate a little bit from what we heard earlier this morning. I want to talk about computer support for the National Cemetery System.

VA top managers do not always have information readily available to access the quality of health care or the effectiveness of services provided to veterans. In the National Cemetery System their job is service to the veteran. In the VA information is contained in over 150 fragmented automated systems and multiple ad hoc manual systems. The information in these systems is not effectively collected nor can it be easily accessed by management.

The National Cemetery System has committed to automation at all levels of business operation. Their short- and long-range goal planning will require the enhancement of national cemeteries' ability to access large volumes of historical data to do workload analysis and the most beneficial distribution of resources.

The automation of benefits delivery will permit the National Cemetery System to exchange information with the Veterans' Benefits Administration and the insurance system, the compensation, pension and education system, and the beneficiary information record locator system to expedite the entire death benefit process.

In its support of automated goals the National Cemetery System and the VA central office automated center are involved in the joint effort to develop an automated burial operations support system called BOSS. This project will provide basic automation ca-

pabilities for the 69 national cemeteries where a director is present, the three national cemetery area offices, and the central office. This will enable the National Cemetery System to automate the paperwork and recordkeeping associated with each interment in national cemeteries.

Currently the interment process function incorporates a mix of automation, manual procedures, paper forms, and voluminous document files. To help the VA determine system needs, an outside study by the Federal IRM Planning Support Center, Office of Software Development and Information Technology of Falls Church, Virginia, formulated a National Cemetery System interment processing workload report.

According to the Falls Church report, workload will continue to increase over the useful life of the proposed system by an annual average of 4 percent through fiscal year 1995 and 14 percent thereafter. The total cost of the proposed BOSS development and maintenance in fiscal year 1990 constant dollars for the period fiscal year 1990 through fiscal year 1996 would be $4.4 million. The total cost avoidance by using this system from fiscal year 1992 through fiscal year 1996 would be $6.6 million, and therefore the system would cost $2.2 million.

But remaining challenges will still require management's continuing commitment as well as support from Congress to ensure the success of these technological advancements in information resources management.

Mr. Chairman, in conclusion, we would like to thank the administrators of the Arlington National Cemetery and the members of the American Battle Monuments Commission for their efforts to provide excellent support services to the veterans of this Nation.

Mr. Chairman, that concludes my testimony. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Dupree appears on p. 119.]

Mr. STAGGERS. I thank the whole panel for the testimony. I really only have two questions.

Most of you have stated that we should encourage States to participate in the State cemetery grant program. Do you have any suggestions how we can better accomplish this with the States?

Mr. BUXTON. Mr. Chairman, the American Legion has been involved in the State cemetery grant program quite significantly. There are some States right now that are trying to have State cemeteries opened. They are looking for fiscal support. I think one of the ways that we can perpetuate the State cemetery program is to continue our grants. There is a waiting list right now for grants to open State cemeteries. That waiting list could be completely obviated if we had some funding from the VA to assist those States. Very frequently those cemeteries, as Mr. Burgess commented, are very nearby to the survivors' place of dwelling.

Secretary Derwinski's plan to have a cemetery available within 75 miles of 75 percent of the veteran population is certainly a valid one.

Mr. BURGESS. We agree with what Mr. Buxton has said, if it is a better use of dollars. It's a 50-50 split, in these times of fiscal constraints it is just one of the suggestions that we did make. If you can get 50 cents matched by the State for your 50 cents and it

moves a cemetery within the State, which is what we called for in our resolution, I think it is a need that can be met at a significantly reduced cost.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. We also agree with that. We have a number of State representatives working with legislatures in the States and have been tasking our people to go forward with an initiative to support State veteran access. The question is always one of money, and I guess the bureaucracy. You can get people excited but it slows down very quickly when you start going through the process. I think anything that might be done from this level to free up the bureaucracy and support the States in their initiatives would facilitate the program.

Mr. MANHAN. Mr. Chairman, the VFW certainly agrees with what has already been said. We support the concept of State veteran cemeteries. I have submitted some resolutions with my written statement that reinforce that. We can add nothing other than what has already been said. Thank you.

Mr. DUPREE. The PVA also supports cemeteries in each State. Like everything else, the States like to be almost guaranteed the funding and if they don't get the support, then it makes them reluctant to want to get involved.

Mr. STAGGERS. Have any of you received complaints regarding individual national cemeteries, and if so, can you tell us which ones those are?

Also, I would suggest that you work with your local chapters and bring it to their attention and maybe ask them for photographs of problem cemeteries that you could share with the subcommittee as we proceed to hold hearings and continue to address this problem. It will make our job a little easier if we can hear from the veterans out there. You all have access to those veterans.

Mr. BUXTON. Mr. Chairman, the only other cemetery that we have evidence of being short funded FTE-wise is Calverton Cemetery in New York.

Mr. STAGGERS. Does anyone else know of any specific ones?

[No response.]

As I said, you may want to contact your local chapters. That would help us do our job.

Mr. Stearns, do you have any questions?

Mr. STEARNS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Also I would like to reiterate what you just indicated. We thank you for your time to come up here to discuss these issues.

I come from central Florida. Primarily it is rural. We have the Sumter Veterans Cemetery down there. Then we have private cemeteries that up until recently have had a go at it, but now they are complaining a little bit to me. I have several questions on that, but before I do, let me ask you a basic question that staff has asked.

Do all of you think it would be a good idea to mandate the use of columbaria at our national cemeteries, or is the VA's garden niche concept, so to speak, accomplishing this purpose?

Mr. BURGESS. I made a comment in my testimony concerning that matter. The garden niche is an entirely different aspect. You have an area where you are interring remains basically in the

ground and you have an area where people can remain next to nature. It is still part of the traditional cemetery concept.

A Columbarium is almost like a memorial wall being erected. I don't want to use the word "squeeze." But you can place a lot more interred remains in a columbarium than you can in a garden niche area.

If people had the choice, there may be some people who would prefer a garden niche concept, but if you have an area where you already have closed cemeteries and perhaps the only way that you can reopen some of these closed cemeteries might be the creation of columbaria, by all means accept that option.

We have 113 national cemeteries but we don't have 113 open national cemeteries. Most of them are closed or will soon be closed. Perhaps you could reopen some of those that are already located quite near population centers that are not now served by the National Cemetery System.

As the VA's own figures show, there are a significant number of people who choose inurnment each year. Of the 61,000, for instance, that were buried last year, there were only about 4,800 or so who were casketed, in-ground remains. So that means there were approximately 13,000 noncasketed remains, this is a significant number of inurned-cremated remains. The balance of inurnments could have chosen a columbarium if one were available.

So there is a need out there. Many people are choosing cremation and the VA needs to be prepared to meet it in whatever the best means should be.

Mr. STEARNS. Do you support mandated use or not?

Mr. BURGESS. I did not use the word "mandate." Perhaps people still need the option—there are some people that don't want to see a columbarium. They would prefer to see the garden niche. If you give them options, they can do whatever they need to do. Some places there may not be an option, especially if you are talking about areas that are already closed, but perhaps enough space could be found to create a columbarium.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. I would just like to say loud and clear, "not mandate it." I don't want those words to have any other interpretation. It should be an option. And it's a great option. It should be available at cemeteries that are closed. That would provide the option for those who choose it to be interred, but it should not be mandated. Thank you.

Mr. MANHAN. Mr. Stearns, the VFW reinforces the statement you have already heard from the Non Commissioned Officers Association and the Disabled American Veterans. There would be no real rationale to mandate that. We see the civilian counterpart, the private mortuaries, also offering fixed casketed burial. Therefore, I think having it as an option is the most viable course.

Mr. BUXTON. Mr. Stearns, I think the American Legion would have a problem supporting mandated burials of that type. I think the inurnment concept, however, has been the salvation of the National Cemetery System. There is no way without that concept that they could keep up with the space requirements for interment. I believe that we probably should continue to support the inurnment concept but not mandate it.

Mr. STEARNS. I totally agree and I think the options are the way to go.

Anyone else?

Mr. DUPREE. The PVA also feels the same way about the mandatory. It should be optional.

Mr. STEARNS. There is a bill, H.R. 103, to amend title 38 to extend eligibility for burial allowances to certain additional veterans and to increase the burial plot allowance for veterans from $150 to $300. Mr. Chairman, this is by Ben Gilman.

Is it possible that you folks know anything about this bill? It is in the 102nd Congress, H.R. 103. It is basically a bill that gives choice and incentive to choose. I was just interested in your comments. If you don't, I will be glad to give you a copy of this and perhaps you could look it over.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. I would like to make a broad comment. We are supporting Mr. Gilman in that effort.

Mr. STEARNS. Could I assume that the other organizations are supporting this, or is it just you are not familiar with H.R. 103?

Mr. BURGESS. We could provide you with our written statement concerning that matter.

Mr. STEARNS. Mr. Chairman, is it possible I could get their written statement on how they feel about the bill?

Mr. STAGGERS. It is totally possible and we would expect them to supply that to the subcommittee.

Mr. STEARNS. I didn't hear all your testimony.

Mr. Chairman, I just have one more question. Do you think there are widespread problems? When I am down in my district I hear that there are problems with the national cemeteries. I am trying to determine if on the national basis there are widespread problems. Or are we just hearing isolated incidents?

Mr. BURGESS. I don't think we are hearing isolated incidents. The material that has been made available to us during our research for this Committee presentation has indicated that Riverside is not the only national cemetery that has a problem. Many of the problems that have been fixed in the past are Band-Aids that have been applied. These temporary fixes are now falling apart.

The problem has been lack of funds to provide what needs to be done. For instance, when you are running this backlog, the average life expectancy of the major fixed pieces of equipment has already been exceeded by 5 years. That is something that should have been replaced 5 years ago is still in use. The problem then becomes you have to use your FTEE, which is already short, to repair and maintain a piece of equipment which should have been junked and a new piece of equipment bought. Then you wouldn't have needed to waste man-hours maintaining the equipment and it could have been better used to maintain the graves. This is system-wide.

We have had made available to us, as Mr. Principi mentioned earlier today, a rather exhaustive list which mentions every cemetery in the National Cemetery System. In essence, they all need pieces of equipment. Here in Baltimore, Maryland, they need a casket carrier for $1,500; a snow removal unit for $1,800; a tractor for $4,000; a pressure washer for $3,000; an interment shelter for $4,500; and a dump truck for $20,000. It goes on. Casket carriers! How much more basic can a need be?

Part of what we are talking about with the Riverside problem is a piece of equipment that compacted the ground. After you place a gasket and the graveliner in the ground, you need to shred the earth and then compact the earth back over the hole you just made. That piece of equipment was broken. They couldn't compact the earth correctly. So when it rained, the earth made the sinkholes that are so evident in the pictures.

If the Federal Government is spending millions of dollars on each Patriot being shot, it ought to be able to find one or two million or two million here or one or two million there saved test firing something and apply it to the National Cemetery System. I don't want to tell the Federal Government where to get the money from, but please use it where it is needed. Don't use it just to be using it. Use it where it can do the most good.

Mr. MANHAN. Mr. Stearns, the VFW feels that it is another crisis waiting to happen. We support everything DAV has said. In our written statement we suggested that an additional almost $11 million would be needed by the National Cemetery System in a line item called "Minor Construction for the National Cemetery System." This would be for developing some of the undeveloped 6000 acres that are within the system; properly prepare, sod, and so forth.

A lot of the projects that come under minor construction are contracts that are valued at $3 million or less. This is something that has not been addressed within the last three to four budgets.

Everybody is aware of what it takes just to do equipment. We are sort of like the little Dutch boy, plugging holes in a dike. It is going to get worse as time goes on unless the system is properly funded.

Mr. STEARNS. Anyone else?

Mr. BUXTON. I believe it was last year's testimony of the American Legion in support of the funding for the National Cemetery System that we had researched an $11 million backlog in purchase of equipment for the National Cemetery System. What Mr. Burgess mentioned is certainly true. We were told by the officials at Riverside that the equipment to properly handle the earth there was not operable, that they had hoped to come back. When you are burying 150 people a week it is very difficult to play catch-up in tamping down. They just didn't have the equipment there to do it.

I can't see how Riverside would be an isolated incident. We do hear various comments from time to time about cemeteries, but the major complaint we have had has been Riverside.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. I would have to agree with everything that has been said. The problem is bigger than Riverside. It's brown grass where there is not enough money to do the watering or the equipment to get the water to where it needs to go; it's shrubbery that is dying, and when a visitor comes into the cemetery it is readily apparent; it's trees that need pruning.

As was commented earlier, it's a sleeping giant and eventually when the people just get so fed up with broken equipment and the lack of money to buy equipment that the problem will be apparent around the country in one cemetery after another.

Mr. BUXTON. Mr. Stearns, there is a part of Riverside Cemetery that is referred to by the local folks out there as Boot Hill. It is the exact opposite of the spectrum of sunken, flooded graves. They

have graves that are on a hillside that are so overgrown with weeds and so forth, that they can't identify the grave markers. The reason for that is that they don't have the equipment to handle the weeds.

Mr. STEARNS. Mr. Dupree.

Mr. DUPREE. All I can add, sir, is that it appears to me that maybe Riverside is the tip of the iceberg when you look at the total system. If Memorial Day didn't fall in May when everything was green, we probably wouldn't notice it as quickly as if it was in the middle of winter when everything is already dead.

Mr. STEARNS. Mr. Chairman, those are all the questions I have. Thank you for the time.

Mr. STAGGERS. Thank you. I thank the panel. There may be additional questions. If you could respond to Mr. Stearns' request, we would appreciate that also.

Our last panel will be Mr. Cline and Mr. Weber and Mr. Watkins.

Mr. Cline, we will start with you whenever you are ready. However you want to proceed.

STATEMENT OF MICHAEL CLINE, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, ENLISTED ASSOCIATION OF THE NATIONAL GUARD OF THE UNITED STATES

Mr. CLINE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We have submitted a copy of our testimony for the record and would like to summarize from that statement.

Mr. STAGGERS. Without objection, so ordered. Your statement will be part of the record.

Mr. CLINE. I am glad to be here today to share the views of the Enlisted Association of the National Guard of the United States, the voice of some 490,000 enlisted men and women of the National Guard. I would like to spend the majority of my time talking about the issue of burial rights for 20-year members of the Selected Reserve.

Operation Desert Storm has proved that the reserve components are a vital and active part of the Total Force. An honorably discharged member of the active duty force receives burial benefits after some 730 days of active duty service. They start accruing time for their eligibility the moment they begin basic training, attending individual training schools, attending required training schools of leadership.

In the reserve component on the other hand, the average enlisted member of the National Guard or Reserve spends some 50 paid days a year on active duty. The officer population spends some 80 paid days a year. This does not include the time that they volunteer their own time.

They also spend an additional 5 to 6 months in basic and advanced training. Over a 20-year period Guardsmen and Reservists will be required to attend the same schools that the active duty soldier did. This training adds up to an average of 1240 days of training, or roughly three and a quarter years, not including the number of days a member will be required to be called for State active duty during that 20-year period.

The reserve component soldier is not allowed to count any of his time towards anything but retirement points. If the RC soldier gets out before 20 years, he receives no benefits. If the RC soldier is eligible for retirement after 20 years, he should also be eligible for proper military burial.

As of September 1990 there were 980,000 Selected Reserve forces serving our country. Of these 980,000, 94 percent are already eligible for the benefit because of prior service or other reasons. Only six percent could benefit from a change in current statute.

Statements made by representative of the American Cemetery Association previously before this subcommittee said that "according to VA figures, less than 15 percent of veterans eligible for burial in a national cemetery choose National Cemetery System interment at the time of death." The 6th QRMC estimates burials would only increase approximately 365 members per year, or a little less than 1/2 percent of the current amount of burials. That amount will drop with the call-up of almost 228,000 Guardsmen and Reservists for Operation Desert Storm. Giving the 20-year veteran of the Selected Reserve a proper military burial is not a financially unreasonable demand.

An additional 228,000 troops of the National Guard and Reserve are now eligible because of Operation Desert Storm.

Currently there are 64 cemeteries that handle military interment. Only one was scheduled to open sometime in fiscal year 1992. We have heard today that will be in fiscal year 1993.

The time to expand the National Cemetery System is now before it is overrun. You have asked for some possible solutions for the problem, and I offer these.

Currently the Defense Department is prepared to spend almost $6 billion to close down 43 military bases. We have heard about Fort Sheridan in Chicago; we have heard about the Presidio in San Francisco. We ask that some of these bases be transferred to the National Cemetery System for burial.

On most bases we have golf facilities, which will make ideal burial facilities. The area is already maintained and the surroundings are peaceful. There is easy access by preexisting roads, low maintenance cost; irrigation systems are in place; maintenance equipment is already in place, and maintenance crews already serve the grounds. This holds true of the characteristics of the golf facility with respect to surrounding and maintenance.

We also encourage States to establish their own military cemeteries under the auspices of the DVA. Families of loved ones must have access to a nearby cemetery if so needed.

In closing, Mr. Chairman, we feel that if one of these options is implemented, our National Guard and Reserve soldiers and airmen will be honored in a way so fully deserved. Our suggestions could also ease the pressure the NCS might be facing in the future.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before this Committee. I will be happy to answer any questions at this time.

Mr. STAGGERS. Thank you, Mr. Cline.

Mr. Weber.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Cline appears on p. 124.]

STATEMENT OF LA VERN E. WEBER (RET.), EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, NATIONAL GUARD ASSOCIATION OF THE UNITED STATES

Lieutenant General WEBER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. On behalf of our 56,000 members of the National Guard Association of the United States, I am honored to be here with you this morning. In the interest of time and at the risk of being repetitive, I will limit my remarks to only two items, both applying equally to the total Selected Reserve, one being the $21.00 United States flag that we think is appropriate in the recognition area for members of the Selected Reserve. The other is the 20 years of satisfactory service in the Selected Reserve.

Let me first express my thanks and appreciation to the entire Veterans' Affairs Committee for the splendid work that you did in such short order this year in dealing with the shortcomings of the Soldier and Sailor Civil Relief Act. We are most appreciative to you for that, as are our members out in the field.

Last year I spent a considerable amount of time characterizing the service in the Total Force by members of the National Guard and the Reserve elements. Desert Shield and Desert Storm validated those statements that I made last year with respect to what it is that we ask of these citizen soldiers in the Total Force Policy.

As Sergeant Cline indicated, our enlisted members spend 55 days a year, the officers 80 days a year across the board to get into specialized areas, like pilots. An Air National Guard pilot must spend 99 days a year to meet the minimum requirements. In many instances they perform many, many more days than that.

We appreciate the fact that you changed the law to provide veteran status to the over 200,000 members of the Selected Reserve that were called up for service in connection with Desert Storm. We appreciate those numbers and we particularly appreciate the fact that the days and other conditions were addressed in a minimum fashion.

We are quite confident in our statements to you that as a Guardsman and Reservist spends 20 years of service in one of those elements or components of the Reserves that they do accumulate far in excess of the 2 years of required active duty. In fact, all of them must have a considerable amount of active duty to be eligible for retention in the Guard and Reserve. So we think that they do qualify fully and therefore they should be afforded the opportunity to receive burial benefits when they complete those 20 years of service.

I will be prepared, sir, to answer any questions that you may have. Thank you.

Mr. STAGGERS. Mr. Watkins.

[The prepared statement of General Weber appears on p. 129.]

STATEMENT OF JAMES E. WATKINS, JR., AMERICAN CEMETERY ASSOCIATION

Mr. WATKINS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am a past president of the American Cemetery Association. I have appeared before this subcommittee before and we much appreciate it.

I have with me this morning Mr. Steven Morgan, Executive Vice President of the American Cemetery Association, whose services are available to the Committee at any time.

I will summarize very briefly our written testimony and ask that the full testimony be placed in the record.

Mr. STAGGERS. Without objection, your whole testimony will be made part of the record.

Mr. WATKINS. Our written testimony focused on three principal concerns.

First, the need to restore the VA plot and marker allowance.

Second, the creation of an unprecedented increase in the burial caseloads of the national cemeteries due to the curtailment of the plot and marker allowances.

Third, the need for proper fiscal planning and future cost projections prior to any expansion of the National Cemetery System.

Mr. Chairman, your opening remarks summarized much of what I was going to say, and I applaud them for recognizing the problem that has come upon us. Just about all of the testimony that I have heard this morning backs that up.

I might say that we take no particular joy in saying that we have heard this morning some problems that we have been recognizing in our testimony for the last 4 or 5 years. Maybe the last 10 years.

I guess a cemetery in some ways can be compared to a kitten. A kitten grows up to be a cat. A new cemetery, as new veteran cemeteries were at one time, can be operated very economically, very efficiently; budgeting is a fairly simple operation. However, as they mature and their burial caseload increases, the problems, most of them unforseen problems—the Riverside case is not unusual in the industry—have to be fixed. I can sympathize with your crew at Riverside. They had a tough one there. It sounds like they have handled it.

But those costs keep going up. There is no quick fix. I have heard many people say this morning we need more funding for more equipment; we need this and that. That's true, and I would agree. We have to have that. But what we see is this increasing—as the cemetery matures that increase becomes exponential in money requirements. If we think this hearing is tough this morning and the budget procedure is tough this year, imagine this hearing 10 years from now.

Perhaps what I am saying in summarizing is we can't afford the system we have, so let's expand it very carefully.

What we have asked for for the past several years, and I would request it again, is a blue ribbon study of the future needs. Not just for the ensuing budget year, but for the long-term future of the entire system. We know from our own experience that there is a tremendous unfunded liability associated with the operation of the system. With the operation of any cemetery there is a future liability. Every State but one has recognized this in the private cemetery industry by requiring trust funds for the future, recognizing that somebody is going to have to come up with the money to maintain cemeteries in perpetuity.

The National Cemetery System came back for an additional appropriation of $15 million last year, which we supported in these hearings. I understand their request for additional appropriations

is $11 million this year. We recognize it. We are in the business. We know what those requirements are.

We would hope that there would be a very careful study. We offer the services of the private cemetery industry through the American Cemetery Association, the people who have been in this business. I have been in the business all my life; my father was before me. Quite frankly, we haven't heard anything new this morning about problems coming up, equipment getting old.

This is our offer, sir. In the interest of time, I will stop and leave my formal testimony in the record. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Watkins appears on p. 135.]

Mr. STAGGERS. Thank you, Mr. Watkins. I want to thank the whole panel.

Mr. Cline, how many of your members were called up to serve in Operation Desert Storm?

Mr. CLINE. Approximately 80,000 National Guardsmen were called up, sir. Of those, 69,000 were enlisted members.

Mr. STAGGERS. Mr. Weber, you mentioned the burial flag. Currently there is a burial flag eligibility for Reservists and National Guardsmen who die prior to the age of 60. That is a benefit contained in title 10. Are you advocating amendments to title 10 or title 38?

Lieutenant General WEBER. We merely are suggesting that the law be altered, that that be applied after they reach the age of 60. While they are active members of the National Guard they are entitled to the flag, but as soon as they retire they are no longer entitled to the $21 flag.

Mr. STAGGERS. Mr. Watkins, in reference to your report that you were urging about the maintenance expense over the next 20 years, how much have your costs escalated over the last 5 years and how do you budget that in? Can you explain that a little bit for us?

Mr. WATKINS. Our cost increment has been running at or above the consumer price index for several years, as has any equipment and labor based cost. We figure approximately 70 percent of the costs of our industry are in personnel and equipment. Those, of course, are the most volatile items. We budget an increase and hope we guess right and then hope that we can live within the constraints of endowment care funds.

The big difference between the private industry and the National Cemetery System is that we do set up endowment care funds the income from which can be used to defray these expenses. We don't depend on current income every year for doing it.

Mr. STAGGERS. Mr. Stearns, do you have any questions?

Mr. STEARNS. Mr. Chairman, I have one question. It sort of follows up on what your last question was. We have been hearing witnesses say that the system is in a crisis, seriously undersized; we need more funds, and so forth. From your standpoint, you have obviously followed the costs of the VA hospitals and the money that the Congress has appropriated. Is there any possibility that the private industry, the American Cemetery Association, your members, would be interested in taking over and doing the job for less money?

Mr. WATKINS. Well, sir, the National Cemetery Act of 1973 did accomplish just that through the plot and interment allowance, which allowed the veteran to select burial space in his own home community, which might be near other members of his family; it might have church connections for him, or what have you. It allowed the government to discharge its obligation at infinitely less expense. That was $150. That was a one-time charge and it was done. When you build that cemetery and make a burial, you are going to take care of that space forever. As we have heard, some years more expensively than others. That price is going to go up every year forever. The plot and interment allowances was a one-time charge.

Mr. STEARNS. I was more alluding to contracting out the work of taking care of the veterans cemeteries to private industry.

Mr. WATKINS. To my knowledge, that hasn't been specifically explored, sir. Again, that could be part of the study that we advocate. Members of the private industry would volunteer, and I will put myself at the head of that list.

Mr. STEARNS. That is sort of where I am moving. When I come to these hearings, particularly a hearing like this and you feel that we don't have enough money, it's a crisis, and so forth, maybe we should look at a study to let private industry try and do this and work out some kind of arrangement. As I understand from the staff, private industry cannot now do this. Maybe we should look at a pilot program of letting you try to do it and see if you can make a profit and still do it.

Mr. WATKINS. Very possibly, sir. I would submit, given the direction that the system seems to be heading at this point, if you think we have a crisis now, you ain't seen nothing yet. That's why I said imagine this hearing 10 years from now at the rate we are going now.

We would be pleased to participate in a study in which that would be one of the proposals on the table. We feel that this study should be done before there is additional expansion of the system. Let's chew what we have bitten off before we bite off more. It's fun to say let's do one in every State and every county, put them around like post offices, but somebody is going to have to pay the bill.

There have been many proposals over the years of possible cooperation. I haven't heard the one that you suggest, actually operating the current cemeteries, but we certainly would be glad to study that along with any other idea that somebody would come up with.

Mr. STEARNS. General Weber, do you have any comments on that proposal?

Lieutenant General WEBER. I believe this is beyond our area of expertise. I would be happy to do some research on it and submit something for the record.

Mr. STEARNS. Mr. Cline.

Mr. CLINE. Sir, we will support anything that gives our veterans the proper burial that they so deserve.

Mr. STEARNS. Mr. Chairman, I am not sure how we would proceed on this idea, whether you think it is worth our continuing maybe on a pilot program to work out something to see if members would be interested. I leave it in your hands.

Mr. STAGGERS. If the gentleman would yield.

Mr. STEARNS. Yes.

Mr. STAGGERS. That is what we are having the hearing for, to come up with solutions. I would be more than willing to work with the gentleman and try to come up with solutions. I think this may be a good starting point.

Mr. STEARNS. I think we have hit upon a good idea and with the help of the Chairman we will pursue it. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. STAGGERS. Thank you, Mr. Stearns.

I want to thank the panel for taking the time to be with us.

I would ask unanimous consent that the National Cemetery Survey which was alluded to earlier be made part of the record. Without objection, it will be so ordered.

(See p. 60.)

Mr. STAGGERS. I do want to thank everybody for participating in this morning's hearing. As I mentioned to Mr. Stearns, I think we did get some good points. Maybe that is a good starting point to take some corrective actions on a very serious problem.

Our national cemeteries are in trouble. Something must be done. To illustrate this point, I would like to close by quoting the very eloquent words of one of the national cemetery directors.

"If our inability to maintain our national cemeteries to the expected level of excellence due a national shrine continues, they will deteriorate to the point when we will incur a much greater cost. That cost will be having to restore not only our national cemeteries to the appropriate level of maintenance, but also the public's faith that our government will meet its obligation to the men and women of our Nation that have given so much preserving the freedoms we all so richly enjoy."

With that, the hearing is closed.

[Whereupon at 11:55 am. the subcommittee was adjourned.]

APPENDIX

MR. STAGGERS

CHAIRMAN

SUBCOMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND MEMORIAL AFFAIRS

APRIL 18, 1991

THE SUBCOMMITTEE WILL COME TO ORDER.

I AM PLEASED THAT THE DEPUTY SECRETARY, TONY PRINCIPI, CONSIDERS THE NEEDS OF THE NATIONAL CEMETERY SYSTEM IMPORTANT ENOUGH TO BE HERE WITH US THIS MORNING. I AM FURTHER PLEASED THAT HE IS ACCOMPANIED BY JO ANN WEBB, DIRECTOR OF THE NATIONAL CEMETERY SYSTEM. IT IS MY UNDERSTANDING THAT AS A RESULT OF A DEPARTMENT-WIDE REORGANIZATION PLAN, THAT MRS. WEBB WILL BE LEAVING THE NATIONAL CEMETERY SYSTEM SHORTLY TO TAKE ON A CHALLENGING NEW POSITION AS ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF POLICY

AND PLANNING. I AM SORRY TO SEE YOU GO BUT KNOW THAT YOU WILL DO AN OUTSTANDING JOB IN YOUR NEW CAPACITY.

AT THE OUTSET, I WISH TO MENTION THAT MRS. WEBB HAS FOUGHT VALIANTLY IN BEHALF OF THE FUNDING NEEDS OF THE NATIONAL CEMETERY SYSTEM. IN SPITE OF HER EFFORTS, HOWEVER, WE ARE FACED TODAY WITH THE SYSTEM'S DETERIORATION.

EVERY YEAR THIS SUBCOMMITTEE HOLDS AN OVERSIGHT HEARING ON THE NATIONAL CEMETERY SYSTEM -- A SYMBOL REPRESENTING THIS NATION'S SHRINE TO OUR FALLEN DEFENDERS.

JUST AS THE FIRST OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA'S PERSIAN GULF CASUALTIES WERE BEING BURIED, 20 ACRES OF THE RIVERSIDE NATIONAL CEMETERY TURNED INTO SINKHOLES. OTHER SECTIONS OF THE CEMETERY WERE ALSO

AFFECTED. THIS IS SHAMEFUL AND APPALLING. IT IS JUST ONE EXAMPLE OF THE NEGLECT THAT HAS PLAGUED THE OVERALL FUNDING LEVELS OF THE NATIONAL CEMETERY SYSTEM FOR YEARS.

WE WILL HEAR TESTIMONY TODAY FROM THE VETERANS ADMINISTRATION STATING THAT THE DAMAGE AT RIVERSIDE WAS CAUSED BY TORRENTIAL RAINS. THIS IS TRUE IN PART. HOWEVER, ACCORDING TO THE LOS ANGELES TIMES, PRIVATE CEMETERIES IN THE SAME AREA REPORTED NO SUCH DAMAGE. IN ADDITION, MY STAFF CALLED MR. BILL KEENE, THE GENTLEMAN WHO'S WIFE IS BURIED AT RIVERSIDE AND WHO TOOK THE PHOTOS WE WILL SHOW YOU SHORTLY. HE INDICATED THAT THE CEMETERY HAD BEEN IN EXTREMELY POOR CONDITION FOR MONTHS.

I WOULD LIKE TO READ AN EXCERPT FROM A LETTER I RECEIVED FROM MRS. LEE ANN HOWARD

FROM SALEM, OREGON, WHO IS 70 YEARS OLD. THIS LETTER IS DATED MARCH 12. "MY HUSBAND SERVED IN THE NAVY IN WORLD WAR II. HE ALWAYS TOLD ME -- "WHEN IT'S TIME FOR THE MAKER TO CALL ME HOME, I WANT TO BE BURIED IN A VET'S CEMETERY. SO IN 1982 WHEN HE PASSED AWAY, I GRANTED HIS WISHES. I HAVE BEEN BACK THERE TWICE. BOTH TIMES THAT CEMETERY WAS A DISGRACE TO OUR VETERAN'S CEMETERIES. TO MY REGRET, I COULD NOT FIND MY HUSBAND'S GRAVE -- FOR WEEDS AND GOPHERS HAD TAKEN OVER ALL THE GRAVES. THIS CEMETERY IS AT RIVERSIDE, CALIFORNIA. MY HUSBAND'S GRAVE IS IN SECTION 1, GRAVE 91. PLEASE LOOK INTO THIS MATTER AND DON'T LET OUR SERVICE FELLOWS LAY IN DISGRACE."

I AM SURE THAT BY THE TIME THIS SUBCOMMITTEE GOES TO CALIFORNIA IN MAY, THAT RIVERSIDE WILL LOOK SUBSTANTIALLY IMPROVED. I AM HEARING REPORTS TO THAT

EFFECT; BUT THEN, BAD PUBLICITY USUALLY RESULTS IN SOME WINDOW DRESSING. BUT WHAT OF THE OTHER 112 CEMETERIES?

IT IS MY UNDERSTANDING THAT THE GOLDEN GATE NATIONAL CEMETERY CURRENTLY HAS A $60,000 BUDGET FOR GOPHER CONTROL. IT SHOULD BE NOTED, HOWEVER, THAT MY SUBCOMMITTEE STAFF WENT OUT THERE IN 1989. ACCORDING TO A RECENT ARTICLE WHICH APPEARED IN THE LOS ANGELES TIMES, THERE WERE APPROXIMATELY 100 GOPHERS PER ACRE AT THAT CEMETERY IN 1989. AT THAT TIME, STAFF WAS ALSO ADVISED THAT THE GOLDEN GATE NATIONAL CEMETERY HAD A LARGER VARIETY OF WEEDS IN THAT LOCATION THAN ANYWHERE ELSE IN THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA AND THAT BOTANICAL STUDENTS FROM NEARBY UNIVERSITIES WENT THERE TO STUDY THE WEEDS. NOTEWORTHY -- YES! SOMETHING TO BE PROUD OF -- NO!

WHY DOES IT TAKE CONGRESSIONAL INTEREST IN A PARTICULAR CEMETERY TO GET ADEQUATE FUNDING? ALTHOUGH GOLDEN GATE MAY NOW HAVE FUNDING FOR RODENT CONTROL, A SURVEY SENT OUT TO THE FIELD LAST DECEMBER INDICATES THAT MANY CEMETERIES HAVE NO FUNDING AT ALL FOR THIS PURPOSE. AS A MATTER OF FACT, THE MAJORITY OF CEMETERIES REPORT THAT THEY COULD USE ADDITIONAL FUNDING FOR GRAVE SINKAGE, MOWING, SODDING AND EQUIPMENT REPAIR AND REPLACEMENT.

GIVEN THE CONDITIONS THAT EXIST IN MOST CEMETERIES THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY, I WONDER WHY SECRETARY DERWINSKI DID NOT DID NOT ASK FOR NEW FUNDING WHEN CONGRESS WAS CONSIDERING A SUPPLEMENTAL FOR OPERATION DESERT STORM. AFTER ALL, IT IS REASONABLE TO ASSUME THAT THE PATRIOTISM GENERATED BY THE PERSIAN GULF WAR WILL BRING THOUSANDS OF NEW PEOPLE TO OUR

NATIONAL CEMETERIES NOT ONLY ON MEMORIAL DAY AND THE 4TH OF JULY BUT THROUGHOUT THE YEAR.

IT IS MY UNDERSTANDING THAT IN THE LAST FOUR YEARS ALONE, THE NATIONAL CEMETERY SYSTEM BUDGET REQUEST HAS BEEN SHORT BY $38.9 MILLION. INTERMENT AND GRAVESITE MAINTENANCE WORKLOAD HAS GONE UP BY 36.1% AND 28.4% RESPECTIVELY BUT EMPLOYMENT LEVELS HAVE GONE DOWN BY 5.4% WE HAVE A CEMETERY WHICH IS FULLY CONSTRUCTED IN NORTHERN CALIFORNIA BUT CAN'T OPEN BECAUSE THERE IS NO MONEY IN THE ADMINISTRATION'S REQUEST. THIS DOESN'T MAKE SENSE!

MANY WITNESSES WILL STATE IN THEIR TESTIMONY THAT THE NATIONAL CEMETERY SYSTEM SHOULD NOT BE TRANSFERRED TO THE AMERICAN BATTLE MONUMENTS COMMISSION.

LET ME SHOW YOU A COUPLE OF PICTURES.

THE FIRST DEPICTS A TYPICAL CEMETERY ADMINISTERED BY THE ABMC. THE SECOND IS A PHOTO OF RIVERSIDE ADMINISTERED BY THE VA. WHERE WOULD YOU WANT YOUR LOVED ONE TO BE BURIED? I ALSO WANT TO TAKE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO SHOW YOU OTHER EXAMPLES OF WHAT ALL OUR NATIONAL CEMETERIES COULD LOOK LIKE IF WE DON'T FUND THEM ADEQUATELY.

WE HAVE ADDITIONAL SETS OF PHOTOS IF SOME MEMBERS OF THE PRESS WOULD LIKE THEM.

BEFORE WE HEAR FROM OUR FIRST PANEL, I WOULD LIKE TO RECOGNIZE THE RANKING MINORITY MEMBER FROM THE SUBCOMMITTEE, THE HONORABLE DAN BURTON OF INDIANA.

HONORABLE HARLEY O. STAGGERS, JR.
APRIL 18, 1991

CLOSING STATEMENT

I WANT TO THANK EVERYONE WHO PARTICIPATED IN THIS MORNING'S HEARING.

OUR NATIONAL CEMETERIES ARE IN TROUBLE. SOMETHING MUST BE DONE. TO ILLUSTRATE THIS POINT, I WOULD LIKE TO CLOSE BY QUOTING THE VERY ELOQUENT WORDS OF ONE OF OUR NATIONAL CEMETERY DIRECTORS.

"IF OUR INABILITY TO MAINTAIN OUR NATIONAL CEMETERIES TO THE EXPECTED LEVEL OF EXCELLENCE DUE A NATIONAL SHRINE CONTINUES, THEY WILL DETERIORATE TO THE POINT WHEN WE WILL INCUR A MUCH GREATER COST. THAT COST WILL BE HAVING TO RESTORE NOT ONLY OUR NATIONAL CEMETERIES TO THE APPROPRIATE LEVEL OF MAINTENANCE, BUT ALSO THE PUBLIC'S FAITH THAT OUR GOVERNMENT WILL MEET ITS OBLIGATION TO THE MEN AND WOMEN OF OUR NATION THAT HAVE GIVEN SO MUCH PRESERVING THE FREEDOMS WE ALL SO RICHLY ENJOY."

NATIONAL CEMETERY SYSTEM
TOP 5 NEEDS NOT MET
Order of Importance (1 most vital)

CEMETERY	EQUIP REPLACE MENT	EQUIP REPAIR	HEAD STONE MAINT	PRUNING & TREE MNT/REPL	GROUNDS MAINT	LAND-SCAP-ING	BUILDING MAINT & CONST	TRAIN ING	PER-SONNEL	ADP	WATER	WATER SYSTEM REPAIR	ROAD REPAIR	SUNK GRAVE REPAIR	OTHER
Alexandria			4				1						2		3 Security
Arizona									3						1 Supplies, Services, Utilities
Baltimore	3		2			4								1	
Barrancas	4				3	2			1						
Bath	1														
Bay Pines	3			1		2									
Beverly, et a	3				1		2								3 Rodent/Pest/Weed Control
Biloxi	2								1						
Black Hills	2								1						
Calverton	1				2	4		3							
Camp Butler	1	3	2		4			5							
Camp Nelson	2		5				1						3		4 Sunken Grave Repair
Chattanooga	1	3	2						4						
City Point*															
Cold Harbor*												3			
Corinth	4	2			1		5								
Culpeper	2				1										
Danville							3	5	4			2	1		1 Storage
Dayton					2										
Eagle Point	1				2			4		3	5				
Fayetteville	1							2	3						
Florence	3	2			4		1			5					
Florida					2	1			3	5					1 Purchase Property for Expansion
Fort Harrison*															
Ft. Bliss/Bay	4		3			5			1		2				
Ft. Custer	2				1										
Ft. Gibson	2				1		4	3							

TOP 5 NEEDS NOT MET
Order of Importance (1 most vital)

CEMETERY	EQUIP REPLACE MENT	EQUIP REPAIR	HEAD STONE MAINT	PRUNING & TREE MNT/REPL	GROUNDS MAINT	LAND-SCAP-ING	BUILDING MAINT & CONST	TRAIN ING	PER-SONNEL	ADP	WATER	WATER SYSTEM REPAIR	ROAD REPAIR	SUNK GRAVE REPAIR	OTHER
Ft. Logan	1				2			4	3						
Ft. McPherson	2	5	4	5			1					3			
Ft. Mitchell	3	2							1						
Ft. Richardson			4				1	3							2 Grave Locator System
Ft. Rosecrans	5		3		4	2					1				
Ft. Sam Houst	2					4			3			5			
Ft. Scott	2						1		3						
Ft. Smith	1		4				2					5		3	
Ft. Snelling	3		2			1	4	5							
Glendale*															
Golden Gate	1		2	3	5										
Hampton					3	5	1					4	2		
Houston	1	2	4							5					3 Management efficient operation
Indiantown Ga	2			4					3					1	
Jeff'son Brks	2		4		3	1									
Keokuk/Quincy	3				2		1								
Knoxville	3		2		1										
Leavenworth			3		4	1				5			2		
Lebanon		2		4	3	1									
Little Rock	3				2				4	5					1 Renovation of All Sections
Long Island							1						2		
Long Island	3				4			5					2	1	
Los Angeles	3		4				1				2				
Marietta	2						1								
Massachusetts	1				2				3						
Memphis	2					3		5		4					1 Wall Repairs
Mobile*				1		2									

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NATIONAL CEMETERY SYSTEM
TOP 5 NEEDS NOT MET
Order of Importance (1 most vital)

CEMETERY	EQUIP REPLACE MENT	EQUIP REPAIR	HEAD STONE MAINT	PRUNING & TREE MNT/REPL	GROUNDS MAINT	LAND-SCAP-ING	BUILDING MAINT & CONST	TRAIN ING	PER-SONNEL	ADP	WATER	WATER SYSTEM REPAIR	ROAD REPAIR	SUNK GRAVE REPAIR	OTHER
Mountain Home	2				1	5	4		3						
Nashville	1				2	4		3	3						
Natchez	1								2						
New Bern	5			4		3	1								2 Wall Repair
Port Hudson			3	2			1								
Puerto Rico	1	4			3		2								
Punchbowl	2				1		5	3							4 Projects
Quantico	1		3			4			2						
Raleigh	4		3	2		1									
Richmond															
Riverside		1	2			4						3			
Rock Island			1						2						3 Rodent Control
Salisbury	2					4			1	5					3 G.O.E. Projects
San Francisco	2		4				1				3		5		
Santa Fe					4	1					3	2			
Seven Pines*															
Springfield	1		3		2	4									
West Virginia	1														2 Equipment Storage
Willamette	1				3	4									2 Interment Supplies & Materials
Wilmington							1								
Wood	3					5	1		4						2 More Burial Space
Woodlawn				1											
Zachary Taylor		2	1		4		3						3		
DCOUNT=1	16	1	2	3	8	7	16	0	6	0	1	0	1	3	5
DCOUNT=2	17	6	7	2	10	4	3	1	3	0	2	2	5	0	5
DCOUNT=3	12	2	7	1	6	2	2	5	10	1	2	3	2	1	5

NATIONAL CEMETERY SYSTEM
MAINTENANCE
Order of Importance (1 most vital)

CEMETERY (77)	ROAD REPAIR	HEAD STONE CLEAN	SUNK GRAVE REPAIR	IRRI-GATION REPAIR	BUILDING REPAIR	MOWING TRIM	HEAD STONE REPAIR	EQUIP-MENT REPAIR	OTHER
Long Island	5	6	1	9	7	2	4	3	8 TREES, SHRUBS
Los Angeles	8	2	7	3	5	1	6	4	
Marietta	2	4	7	5	1	6	8	3	MOWER MAINT
Marion	4			6	1	9			
Massachusetts	5	7	9	3	2	6	8	1	4 ENERGY IMPROVEMENTS
Memphis	2	8	4	9	5	7	3	6	1 REMOVAL/RENOVATION HISTO
Mobile*	5	4	2				3		1 TREES
Mountain Home	7	4	3	8	5	1	2	6	
Nashville	5	9	8	4	7	10	3	2	1
Natchez	2	6	5		4		3	1	
New Bern	9	5	7	8	1	4	6	3	2 WALL REPAIR
Port Hudson	4	6	8	9	1	2	7	5	3 TREES
Puerto Rico	7	8	1	10	6	9	5	2	3 EQUIP ACQUISITION, 4 - M
Punchbowl	1	8	3	2	6	7	4	5	
Quantico	2	6	4	1	8	7	5	3	
Raleigh	8	4	1	9	7	5	2	6	3 TREES, SHRUBS
Richmond	1	4	3		6	2	5	7	
Riverside	7	8	5	2	6	3	4	1	
Rock Island	8	4	9	9	9	9	3	8	
Salisbury		1	3			5	2	4	6 TREES, SHRUBS
San Francisco	6	4	5	8	1	9	7	3	2 WALL REPAIR
Santa Fe	9	10	1	4	8	6	3	2	7 FERTILIZING, SODDING
Seven Pines*		4	5		2	1	5	9	
Springfield	5	4	1	8	6	2	7	3	
West Virginia	7	4	3	8	6	1	2	5	9 WATER DRAINAGE
Willamette	3	6	5	4	8	7	2	1	
Wilmington	1				2				
Wood	6	7	4	8	3	2	5	1	
Woodlawn	3	8	6	9	4	10	7	5	1 TREE WORK
Zachary Taylo	3	8	5	9	4	7	6	1	2 TREE REMOVAL
DCOUNT=1	6	1	11	5	11	18	2	13	13
DCOUNT=2	8	4	10	5	6	12	13	10	3
DCOUNT=3	9	6	10	9	3	1	17	11	3
DCOUNT=4	5	18	8	6	6	6	10	9	1
DCOUNT=5	10	12	10	5	7	4	12	7	5

NATIONAL CEMETERY SYSTEM
MAINTENANCE
Order of Importance (1 most vital)

CEMETERY (77)	ROAD REPAIR	HEAD STONE CLEAN	SUNK GRAVE REPAIR	IRRI-GATION REPAIR	BUILDING REPAIR	MOWING TRIM	HEAD STONE REPAIR	EQUIP-MENT REPAIR	OTHER
Alexandria	4	5	7	3	2	8	6	1	
Arizona	7	3	2	6	8	9	5	4	1 DUST CONTROL
Baltimore	7	3	1	8	6	5	2	4	
Barrancas	6	2	5	3	7	1	4	8	
Bath	1	4	2	8	9	7	3	6	5 TREE WORK
Bay Pines	3	5	6	4	7	8	2	9	1 TREE PRUNING
Beverly,et al	6	5	2		5	1	4	3	TREES, SHRUBS, TURF
Biloxi	8	5	2	6	7	1	4	3	
Black Hills	8	7	2	3	6	1	4	5	
Calverton	3	9	8	5	4	6	7	2	1 CONCRETE LINERS
Camp Butler	5	4	3		7	6	2	1	TREES
Camp Nelson	3	8	4	6	1	9	5	2	7 WALL REPAIRS
Chattanooga	8	3	6	2	7	1	5	4	TREE MAINT/REMOVAL
City Point*	9	4	3		2	1	5	9	
Cold Harbor*		4	5		2	1	5	9	
Corinth	9	6	7	3	2	4	8	1	5 TREE WORK
Culpeper	5	4	2	6	7	1	3	1	
Danville	2	8	4	1	3	6	5	7	TREES, SHRUBS, DRAINAGE
Dayton	2	5	6		7	8	3	4	1 HISTORICAL MONUMENTS
Eagle Point	3	4	5	2	7	6	1	8	
Fayetteville	5	4	8	9	3	7	6	2	1 EXPANSION AND RENOVATION
Florence	3	5	7	4	1	8	6	2	
Florida	5	3	7	1	4	2	8	6	9 WOODLAND MANAGEMENT PRO
Ft. Bliss/Bay	6	8	1	2	7	5	3	4	9 TREES, SHRUBS, TURF
Ft. Custer	8	5	1	6	7	2	4	3	9 STONE WALL REPAIR
Ft. Gibson	10	9	4	6	7	1	8	2	5 TREES, 3 HERBICIDES
Ft. Harrison*		4	5		2	1	5	9	
Ft. Logan	7	5	2	6	8	1	3	4	1 SEEDING/SODDING NEW GRAV
Ft. McPherson	8	7	1	5	6	2	4	3	
Ft. Mitchell	8	7	3	1	6	4	5	2	
Ft. Richardso	4	2	3	5		6	1		
Ft. Rosecrans	6	8	3	4	5	9	2	7	1 TURF RENOVATION - RESEED
Ft. Sam Houst	8	6	2	1	7	5	3	4	
Ft. Scott	9	5	8	7	1	2	3	4	
Ft. Smith	7	6	4	3	1	8	5	2	
Ft. Snelling	3	4	5	9	8	6	2	7	1 TURF RENOVATION
Glendale*	1	4	5		2	1	5	9	
Golden Gate	4	3	5	3	1	2	2	3	
Hampton	2	5	6	3	1	9	4	7	
Houston	2	9	6	8	7	4	3	1	5 EQUIP STORAGE SPACE
Indiantwn Gap	5	5	1	6	5	2	2	1	TREE PRUNING
Jeff'son Brks	7	3	1		4	6	2	5	
Keokuk/Quincy		5	3		6	1	4	2	
Knoxville	8	4	3	7	6	1	2	5	
Leavenworth	1	7	4	8	5	2	3	6	
Lebanon	8	7	2	9	6	4	3	1	5 DEADWOOD REMOVAL
Little Rock	9	2	8	5	6	4	3	7	1 RENOVATION OF ALL SECTIO

FEBRUARY 21, 1991
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON HOUSING & MEMORIAL AFFAIRS
NATIONAL CEMETERY SYSTEM
OPENING REMARKS, HONORABLE DAN BURTON

THANK YOU, MR. CHAIRMAN. I WOULD JUST LIKE TO POINT OUT THAT I SHARE EACH AND EVERY ONE OF YOUR CONCERNS.

I AM EXTREMELY DISAPPOINTED THAT THIS SUBCOMMITTEE MUST CONTINUALLY HOLD HEARINGS ON THE QUALITY OF OUR NATIONAL CEMETERY SYSTEM. MR. CHAIRMAN, THE 1991 V.A. BENEFIT HANDBOOK STATES THAT "THE BENEFIT OF BURIAL IN A V.A. NATIONAL CEMETERY INCLUDES THE GRAVESITE, OPENING AND CLOSING OF THE GRAVE, AND PERPETUAL CARE." IN MY OPINION, IT SHOULD NOT BE TOO DIFFICULT FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS TO PROVIDE THE BENEFITS DESCRIBED HERE IN THIS BOOK.

TRAGICALLY, THE D.V.A APPEARS UNABLE TO PROVIDE THIS ESSENTIAL BENEFIT TO OUR NATION'S VETERANS. I CAN'T EVEN COUNT

THE NUMBER OF TIMES THAT CONSTITUENTS HAVE CONTACTED MY OFFICE TO EXPRESS THEIR OUTRAGE OVER THE MAINTENANCE OF OUR V.A. NATIONAL CEMETERIES. I'M SURE OTHER MEMBERS OF CONGRESS FACE SIMILAR COMPLAINTS.

UNFORTUNATELY, THE COMPLAINTS WHICH MY OFFICE RECEIVES ON A REGULAR BASIS ARE NOT CONFINED TO THE NATIONAL CEMETERY SYSTEM; THEY ALSO EXTEND TO THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE. FOR EACH OF THE LAST THREE YEARS, I HAVE BEEN CONTACTED ABOUT THE MAINTENANCE OF THE GETTYSBURG NATIONAL CEMETERY ANNEX. ACCORDING TO MR. RALPH BEARDSLY, A CONSTITUENT WHO BROUGHT THIS MATTER TO MY ATTENTION, THE GROUNDS AT THIS ANNEX ARE IN SUCH POOR CONDITION THAT HE WANTS TO DISINTER ONE OF HIS RELATIVES BURIED THERE. EACH YEAR, I'VE

CONTACTED THOSE IN CHARGE OF THE ANNEX, BUT NOTHING HAS BEEN DONE TO CORRECT THE PROBLEM.

MR. CHAIRMAN, THE SOLUTION TO THESE CEMETERY PROBLEMS ARE NOT COMPLICATED. IF GRASS NEEDS WATERING, THE CEMETERIES SHOULD WATER IT. IF SOME DIRT NEEDS SEEDING, THEN THE CEMETERIES SHOULD SEED IT. IF OUR CEMETERIES DON'T HAVE THE MONEY TO MAINTAIN THEIR OWN GROUNDS, THEN THE D.V.A. SHOULD REQUEST MORE MONEY. AND IF THE D.V.A. WON'T ASK FOR THE MONEY WHICH IS NECESSARY TO PROVIDE A PROPER BURIAL AND MAINTAIN A DIGNIFIED RESTING PLACE FOR OUR NATION'S WAR DEAD, THEN OUR COMMITTEE MUST FIND SOME WAY TO PROVIDE IT.

MR. CHAIRMAN, THE TIME HAS COME TO TAKE CARE OF THESE PROBLEMS. I LOOK FORWARD TO HEARING THE TESTIMONY OF OUR

WITNESSES HERE TODAY, AND I AM READY TO WORK WITH YOU AND THE ENTIRE SUBCOMMITTEE TO MAKE OUR V.A. NATIONAL CEMETERIES A PLACE WE CAN ALL BE PROUD OF.

STATEMENT OF
THE HONORABLE CLAUDE HARRIS
APRIL 18, 1991
BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON HOUSING
AND MEMORIAL AFFAIRS

MR. CHAIRMAN, I WANT TO THANK YOU FOR GIVING ME THIS OPPORTUNITY TO SUBMIT FOR THE RECORD THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT FOR TODAY'S HEARING. I REGRET THAT I AM UNABLE TO ATTEND THIS HEARING, BECAUSE I AM TRAVELLING TO SAUDI ARABIA ON AN INVESTIGATIVE TRIP FOR SPEAKER FOLEY. AS YOU MAY BE AWARE, CHAIRMAN MONTGOMERY IS ALSO A MEMBER OF THIS TRIP.

TODAY THIS SUBCOMMITTEE WILL BE EXAMINING THE NATIONAL CEMETERY SYSTEM AND A PROPOSAL TO EXTEND BURIAL ELIGIBILITY TO MEMBERS OF THE SELECTED RESERVE WHO HAVE SERVED FOR AT LEAST 20 YEARS.

THE SECOND MATTER IS OF PARTICULAR INTEREST TO ME SINCE I WAS THE PRINCIPAL SPONSOR OF HOUSE RESOLUTION 3706 DURING THE 101ST CONGRESS. HOUSE RESOLUTION 3706 WOULD HAVE PROVIDED BURIAL AND FLAG BENEFITS FOR ALL MEMBERS OF THE SELECTED RESERVE. AFTER LAST YEAR'S HEARING ON A SIMILAR TOPIC, I OFFERED TO AMEND MY LEGISLATION TO RESTRICT THESE BURIAL BENEFITS ONLY TO RESERVISTS WHO HAVE SERVED FOR AT LEAST 20 YEARS. I BELIEVE THIS CHANGE WILL ENSURE THAT THE NATIONAL CEMETERY SYSTEM WILL REMAIN OPEN FOR MANY YEARS TO COME. ACCORDING TO THE 6TH ANNUAL QUADRENNIAL REVIEW OF THE MILITARY COMPENSATION, THIS PROPOSAL IS ESTIMATED TO ADD 365 MORE BURIALS TO THE NATIONAL CEMETERY SYSTEM AT AN ANNUALLY ESTIMATED COST OF $123,000.

THE NATIONAL CEMETERY SYSTEM IS A WONDERFUL TREASURE FOR OUR NATION. HOWEVER, OF THE 113 CEMETERIES THAT ARE CURRENTLY IN THE SYSTEM APPROXIMATELY HALF ARE CLOSED. IN SOME STATES THERE IS NO OPEN CEMETERY. IF THIS LARGE GROUP OF RESERVISTS AND GUARDSMEN IS GIVEN ELIGIBILITY, OUR LIMITED SPACES WILL BE FILLED MORE QUICKLY.

THE NATIONAL GUARD AND RESERVES HAD APPROXIMATELY 142,600 MEN AND WOMEN WHO SERVED IN OPERATION DESERT STORM. I BELIEVE THAT THIS ALONE SHOULD PROVE WHAT AN IMPORTANT PART THAT NATIONAL GUARDSMEN AND RESERVISTS PLAY IN OUR ARMED FORCES. IT IS TIME TO MAKE A CHANGE IN SOME OF THE RULES TO INCLUDE THESE BRAVE MEN AND WOMEN WHO DEVOTE THEIR LIVES TO OUR COUNTRY.

I HOPE THAT TODAY'S HEARING WILL PROVIDE ALL INTERESTED PARTIES AN OPPORTUNITY TO EXPRESS THEIR CONCERNS ABOUT THIS PROPOSAL. IT IS MY HOPE THAT THIS SUBCOMMITTEE WILL COMPLETE ITS CONSIDERATION IN AN EXPEDITIOUS MANNER. I LOOK FORWARD TO WORKING CLOSELY WITH CHAIRMAN STAGGERS ON THIS ISSUE.

I WANT TO THANK THE CHAIRMAN AGAIN FOR LETTING ME PRESENT MY THOUGHTS FOR THE RECORD.

Statement of

REP. GEORGE E. BROWN, JR.

Before the
Subcommittee on Housing and Memorial Affairs
of the
Committee on Veterans' Affairs
of the
United States House of Representatives

April 18, 1991

Mr. Chairman, I want to thank you for convening this hearing and for allowing me the opportunity to speak to you today.

Our national cemeteries should be dignified final resting spots for our nation's veterans and their dependents. It is my understanding that **several** veterans cemeteries across the nation are suffering chronic problems. The men and women of our Armed Forces served our entire nation and thus, regardless of which region of the country we each represent, each one of us owes it to the nation as a whole to see that all of our national veterans cemeteries are well-kept and dignified places.

I can speak to you with some first-hand knowledge of the problems evident at Riverside National Cemetery in California because I represent many of the communities that use the cemetery and because I visited the cemetery earlier this month.

My impressions were that much of the cemetery continues to be beautiful--with green, well-kept lawns that provide the kind of honor and dignity that our nation can be proud of in a cemetery. The cemetery's central office, lakes replete with ducks, and other common facilities were likewise areas we can be proud of.

However, large parts of Riverside National Cemetery--sometimes for as far as the eye can see--were fields of dirt with awkward clumps of weeds sprouting up every three feet or so. Because these areas are in chronic bad condition, the heavy rains that fell in California last month caused the soil over nearly 800 graves in the cemetery to literally sink by up to two feet. During my visit, the sunken and barren soil over the grave sites was dried and cracking in the sun. These areas--which I understand encompass about 40 acres of the cemetery's total of 200 developed acres--are not the kind of final resting spot we should provide for our veterans and their families. If you have not yet seen photographs of these troubled areas of Riverside National Cemetery, I urge you to do so.

During my visit to the cemetery, I was impressed by the efforts underway by the Veterans Administration to repair some of the most severely damaged sites and to reseed some of the chronically barren areas of the cemetery. However, I was also impressed by the enormity of the problem and the fact that the worksite I saw was dwarfed by the barren cemetery areas that were not part of the immediate work plan.

I do want to thank the VA's Deputy Secretary, Anthony Principi, for visiting Riverside cemetery in March and committing the VA to finding some way to improve conditions there. Riverside National Cemetery is the second busiest cemetery in our national system. About 30 burials are conducted every day. The bodies of two of our young war dead from Operation Desert Storm are buried in Riverside National Cemetery, as are two Medal of Honor recipients, one from World War I and the other from World War II.

What are the causes of the problems at Riverside National Cemetery? No doubt, the drought that has plagued California for four years has caused damage and has increased the need for extra work and expenditures at Riverside National. However, over those same four years, Riverside National has received an average of only 83 percent of its annual budget request. This is no doubt similar to the situation at many national cemeteries. Riverside's budget allotment has increased an average of four percent annually over the last four years, which just barely keeps pace with inflation. But each year, the cemetery's number of graves to maintain has increased by 10 to 13 percent. I am obviously not an expert on the budgetary and physical intricacies related to cemeteries. But what I do know is that something must be done so that all of Riverside National Cemetery provides the kind of dignified final resting spot that our nation owes our veterans and their families.

I thank you again, Mr. Chairman, for allowing me to speak to you today, and I urge you to do everything you can to help improve Riverside National Cemetery and all of our nation's troubled national cemeteries.

STATEMENT BY REPRESENTATIVE AL McCANDLESS
TO THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND MEMORIAL AFFAIRS
VETERANS' AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

Hearing, April 18, 1991, on the Riverside National Cemetery

Mr. Chairman, I appreciate the opportunity to submit a statement concerning the deplorable conditions at the Riverside National Cemetery in California. I have visited the Cemetery several times, and met with the director, Theresa Bush.

This afternoon, under the leadership of Chairman Montgomery, I will be joining a small group of House Members on an investigative trip to Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Iraq, to review the conditions under which our armed forces in Operation Desert Storm have been operating. I'm sure that most of the troops we will see on this trip will <u>not</u> be expressing concern about our national cemeteries, or wondering if those cemeteries will be properly maintained in the future, but the sacrifices those men and women have made in the Persian Gulf should serve to remind us of our our long-term commitment to veterans' needs.

Although there were, as General Schwarzkopf said, "miraculously few" casualties from Operation Desert Storm, there were five casualties from my District, perhaps the most of any Congressional District, and several have already been laid to rest at Riverside National Cemetery. The area where they were buried, however, is not the section where other veterans have been buried

in recent years. For those killed in this latest war, the cemetery officials found space in an established section, which is far better maintained. They did not wish to have the news media shocked by the poor conditions in the area where current interments are taking place. In that area there is a most difficult problem, as the ground in dry seasons is hard and unyielding, but it can change dramatically when there is a torrential rain. Recently a strong rain caused grave markers to shift, some of them sinking below the mud.

I am sure that the Department of Veterans Affairs will give you a number of reasons why it is so difficult to establish a proper grass cover in a place that is close to a desert area. As a resident of the desert, I understand that, but proper and adequate landscaping is certainly possible -- even in the desert.

The problem boils down to money and water, not necessarily in that order. The cemetery is dependent upon reclaimed wastewater from March Air Force Base, and when that is depleted, it relies on untreated water which is also obtained through the base. The cemetery must pay the air base for any additional water it uses.

I believe that the Subcommittee will agree that the graves of our honored military veterans should be treated with care and respect. Surely the veterans who served for long months and years in this country's past wars should receive as dignified and beautiful a final resting place as those who perished in the war in the Gulf.

I urge the Subcommittee to consider carefully the possibility of additional funding for better maintenance of the grounds at the Riverside National Cemetery.

Statement of
The Honorable Dick Swett of New Hampshire
before the
Subcommittee on Housing and Memorial Affairs of the Veterans' Affairs Committee
April 18, 1991

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, thank you very much for giving me this opportunity to appear before you today. I am here on behalf of the veterans in my congressional district and throughout the state of New Hampshire to seek your support for the establishment of a state or a national veterans' cemetery at Pease Air Force Base, New Hampshire, which is in the process of being de-commissioned.

I have received numerous calls and letters from veterans urging the designation of a military cemetery on a portion of this land. They have expressed the view that New Hampshire veterans deserve their own cemetery, and I fully share that view.

The men and women who selflessly answered our country's call to arms in times of conflict deserve the option of being buried in a veterans' cemetery near their homes. All of us rejoiced in the outstanding performance of our military forces in the recent Persian Gulf conflict, as we have in other times of war and peace. But it is our responsibility to provide for those who answered our nation's call when ***they*** are in need. We must do more than simply cheer for them at the hour of victory.

Mr. Chairman, the only veterans' cemetery in all of New England where veterans can now choose to be buried is located in Bourne, Massachusetts, on Cape Cod. This is a considerable distance for the families of New Hampshire veterans and for veterans from all of Northern New England. A visit to the grave of a loved one is traumatic enough without adding the experience of a long ride through congested urban traffic.

A significant number of veterans would be served by this potential cemetery. In the State of New Hampshire alone, there are 146,000 veterans. In addition, 153,000 veterans live in Maine, 64,000 in Vermont, and some 130,000 in parts of Massachusetts that are closer to the potential New Hampshire cemetery than to the one currently available in Massachusetts.

Mr. Chairman, I am working with the town of Newington, where a part of the base is located, and we are pursuing negotiations with the Pease Development Authority to obtain land for a cemetery through other channels. I am also working with state officials in pursuing other options that might be available to establish a cemetery in New Hampshire.

Mr. Chairman, I understand the current budget restrictions that limit our actions. Currently the national veterans' cemetery system is in dire need of additional funding, and, like you, I have been horrified by stories of neglected cemeteries and cemeteries that have been approved but not opened because necessary funds have not been made available.

I am here today to articulate a long-held wish of New Hampshire veterans for the designation of a portion of Pease Air Force Base as a veterans' cemetery. I am determined to do all I can to help New Hampshire veterans realize their dream of having a veterans' cemetery in their home state.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Statement of Anthony J. Principi

Deputy Secretary

Department of Veterans Affairs

Before the

Subcommittee on Housing and Memorial Affairs

House Committee on Veterans' Affairs

April 18, 1991

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee,

America's veterans have earned the right to take their final rest in dignity and honor. Our National Cemeteries must honor America's veterans in death, just as the veterans buried there honored our country in life.

That is why I went to Riverside and walked the grounds. That is why I provided the Subcommittee with photographs illustrating conditions there.

I was appalled by what I saw. And, I have taken action to restore that cemetery to the place of honor that the American people, and the Congress that represents them, insist that it be.

As part of the cabinet level Department of Veterans Affairs, that cemetery has access to the resources of a $32 billion, 240,000 person organization. That access provides flexibility that an isolated insular cemetery system would not enjoy.

Mr. Chairman, I have been asked to comment on a proposal to transfer responsibility for the National Cemetery System to the American Battle Monuments Commission, the ABMC.

Frankly, that's not a good idea.

There is nothing to be gained, and much to be lost, in such a transfer.

Mr. Chairman, the Federal government has several separate organizations operating cemeteries for Americans who served the cause of freedom in

uniform. Each organization was set up with its own mission. For instance, Arlington Cemetery is a national monument which also continues to provide burial services for veterans. ABMC has long-time experience in erecting and maintaining wartime memorials and cemeteries overseas after they are closed for burial. And of course, the National Cemetery System operates our nation's veterans cemeteries, which continues to provide burial services for our veterans and their eligible family members. While separate, these organizations serve the common purpose of providing a dignified final resting place for our fallen heros.

Mr. Chairman, consolidations of functions are normally considered when improved services or savings will result. Because most of the resources in these organizations are dedicated to maintenance and operations in the field, it is unclear that any such efficiencies would occur in merging these agencies.

VA exists for no reason other than to provide benefits and services to those who have served our country in uniform. That service is more than our mission, it is our life.

Drought and torrential rain will treat ABMC no more kindly than they treat VA. Equipment will age without regard to which agency maintains it.

Both ABMC and VA, and the Congress that must fund them, are subject to the same crushing budget pressure. The budget agreement will apply tc ABMC, just as it does to VA.

Mr. Chairman, the members of this Subcommittee can point with pride to your role in placing VA in the President's Cabinet. When Secretary Derwinski talks directly to the President about VA's resources, America's veterans are the beneficiaries. I have seen firsthand the fruits of that access, and I see no benefit to the veterans who are buried in our National Cemeteries in surrendering it.

VA is experienced in <u>all</u> phases of caring for veterans and their families as they go through the inevitable trauma of death.

VA has a nationwide network of medical centers, regional offices, and support facilities to provide information and assistance to veterans and their survivors on all aspects of their benefits.

The National Cemetery system is interwoven with the rest of VA. The Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) provides burial flags and funding for graveliners, headstones and gravemarkers. The National Cemetery System uses VBA's TARGET system to verify eligibility. VA medical centers provide personnel, finance and procurement support for national cemeteries. Both VA and the National Cemetery System, and even more importantly, the veterans we serve, would pay a price in reduced efficiency and service if this interwoven fabric of support were to be set asunder.

Transfer of the National Cemetery Service out of VA would fragment service to veterans and could be the first step in dismantling a Department that millions of veterans have worked decades to create.

Mr. Chairman, you also requested the Department's views on a proposal to extend burial eligibility to members of the Selected Reserve who serve for at least 20 years.

Many members of the Selected Reserve already qualify for burial in National Cemeteries based on active-duty service or disabilities sustained while performing reserve duty.

VA acknowledges the valuable role that reservists play in our national defense. Two hundred twenty eight thousand of them demonstrated their readiness and unquestioned willingness to serve when called to active duty to help drive Saddam out of Kuwait. In doing so, they earned our undying respect. They also earned, with their active duty service, the right to burial in a National Cemetery.

However, I note that the veterans' benefit programs developed by Congress over the last four decades are generally not available to individuals whose military service does not include actual active duty. Extension of any

veterans' benefit to individuals who are prepared to serve on active duty, but have not actually done so, could have far-reaching implications. Such an expansion could set a precedent that could extend far beyond the National Cemetery System.

Members of the Selected Reserve represent only a portion of our Nation's reserve military forces. Membership in the Selected Reserve is fluid. Members of the Ready Reserve routinely enter and leave the Selected Reserve depending upon their own needs as well as the needs of the service. As a matter of fairness, as well as for administrative reasons, I question whether a meaningful distinction can be drawn between members of these two organizations.

We estimate that there are now about 1.1 million members of the Selected Reserve, of whom over 700,000 are not currently eligible for burial in a national cemetery. These figures do not include reservists who are already retired. If even a fraction of these individuals are buried in national cemeteries, it will place an additional strain on our system at a time when we are attempting to cope with the challenges presented by the millions of World War II veterans approaching the age where they will use cemetery services.

Twenty-seven of the 65 open cemeteries will close in the next twenty years, even if there is no expansion of eligibility. In short, this proposal would expand eligibility at a time when the workload is expected to increase.

For these reasons, VA opposes expansion of eligibility for burial in a National Cemetery to individuals whose military service does not meet the criteria established under current law.

We estimate the total cost of this proposal to be $164,000 in fiscal year 1992 and $1,122,000 over the next five fiscal years.

National Cemeteries

One of VA's main goals is to make interment in a national cemetery available on as wide a geographic basis as possible. Today, we have 113 national cemeteries located throughout the United States and Puerto Rico. Sixty-five are open to burials; the remaining 48 are closed to the casketed interment of a first family member. Five more cemeteries - New Albany, New Bern, Memphis, Natchez, and the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific - are expected to close before the end of this fiscal year. The rate of closure will remain high over the coming decades.

The aging of the large number of World War II veterans will significantly increase the demand for burial in the national cemeteries. Increasing demand will require that the System identify additional gravesite space in some areas of the country. This could be done by establishing new national cemeteries; by expansion of existing national cemeteries; and by development of innovative approaches for the interment of cremated remains, including the construction and expanded use of columbaria.

This fiscal year, additional land has been acquired at two existing cemeteries. At Willamette (Portland), 65 acres will provide an estimated 31 thousand gravesites. At Fort Smith, we have aquired five additional acres. Negotiations are underway with the Navy to acquire two parcels of land adjacent to Fort Rosecrans (San Diego), and an acre of land is being donated at Fayettteville.

As requested in report language, the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) process is underway for potential new national cemeteries at five sites, with expected completion dates as follows:

Chicago	June	1991
Seattle	September	1991
Albany	November	1991
Cleveland	April	1992
Dallas	February	1993

The EIS process is also being initiated for new cemeteries in the Pittsburgh and Oklahoma City areas. The new San Joaquin Valley National Cemetery in northern California is under construction, with an anticipated completion date of November 1991. This new cemetery will open in the beginning of fiscal year 1993.

Funding

Fiscal year 1991 funding levels are less than adequate to support maintenance activities. Riverside National Cemetery has recently suffered substantial damage as a result of torrential rains. Emergency construction funds in the amount of $300,000 have been committed to correcting the most serious damage; however, another $1 million is required in order to get this cemetery into good condition. Other cemeteries also have critical needs that should be met in order to provide a dignified resting place for our recent and past heroes. VA is advising Congress that we intend to transfer $3 million from supplemental funds to meet these needs.

Operations and maintenance of the National Memorial Cemetery of Arizona suffers due to a statutorily imposed funding cap for the first six months of FY 1992 enacted as part of the legislation that transferred that cemetery from the State of Arizona to NCS. We propose removal of this cap and that NCS be permitted to expend its own General Operating Expenses appropriation within the first six months, in addition to the statutory reimbursements earned, to properly operate and maintain this cemetery in FY 1992.

Management Initiatives

Automation will be one of the most important ways by which NCS can keep pace with its increasing workload, and improve service and efficiency. Computer specialists have been hired for each of our National Cemetery Area Offices to provide expertise and day-to-day technical support to the cemeteries.

VA wants to encourage greater volunteer participation in the national

cemeteries. A new standard operating procedure for the National Cemetery System Volunteer Program will be tested at six cemeteries (2 small, 2 medium, and 2 large). It will then be evaluated, necessary changes made, and introduced nationwide.

Another goal is to ensure that veterans are aware of their entitlement to burial in national cemeteries and other services. We have developed, will implement, and will continue to improve upon, a comprehensive public information plan to increase awareness of NCS programs. Our initiatives will increase public awareness and lessen the effect of misleading advertising, which may discourage veterans and their families from requesting VA burial benefits. We will also emphasize recognition of national cemeteries as national shrines by making the public aware of the historic importance of national cemeteries and by developing an educational enrichment program directed towards school-age children.

Headstones and Markers

Since taking responsibility for the program in September 1973, the National Cemetery System has provided approximately 4.8 million monuments to mark the graves of veterans in this country and overseas. This is the largest activity of its kind in the world and the number of monuments provided continues to grow each year. An estimated 345,000 monuments will be provided in 1991, an increase of 12,000 over 1990.

Presidential Memorial Certificates

The National Cemetery System assumed responsibility for the Presidential Memorial Certificate program in FY 1989. This program was initiated in 1962 by President John F. Kennedy to honor the memory of honorably discharged, deceased veterans. It has been continued by all subsequent presidents. NCS continues to improve the appearance of the certificates, reduce the possibility of error, and increase timeliness and efficiency. Certificates are now generated by computer, with the names printed by laser printer in a special script font. Formerly, the certificates were manually typed and had a less polished appearance.

State Cemetery Grants

VA provides grants to establish, improve, or expand state veterans' cemeteries. This program encourages states to help meet the burial needs of veterans by providing gravesites in areas not adequately served by national cemeteries. This program was extended through FY 1994 in Public Law 100-687.

Nine requests were received in FY 1990 and 7 grants, totaling $810 thousand, were awarded to the States of Hawaii, Maine, Nevada (two), Rhode Island, Tennessee, and Utah. Since the inception of the program, VA has awarded $24.5 million to help establish, expand, or improve cemeteries in 16 states and the territory of Guam. Additional requests, totaling some $17.5 million, are being considered.

Public Law 101-237

Contracts are currently in place and graveliners are being provided at all open cemeteries as required by Public Law 101-237. The use of graveliners also benefits the appearance of the cemeteries by preventing grave sinkage. NCS has also contracted with the State of Michigan to provide for the operation and maintenance of the cemetery on Mackinac Island, as required by this statute.

Technical Amendments

I would like to briefly mention two suggestions for legislative amendments which are strictly technical in nature. The first would clarify the term "minor child" for purposes of burial in a national cemetery. When the cemeteries were transferred to VA in 1973, language which had appeared in Title 24 was simply enacted into Title 38. This does not define the term "minor child." The interpretation which the Army had traditionally used for "minor child" included persons under age 21. This has been embodied in VA regulations ever since. The national cemeteries also adopted the usage of other VA benefit programs and included persons up to age 23, if they were enrolled in an educational institution. We seek to have this codified in Title 38 in order to avoid confusion.

The second proposal is one that you, Mr. Chairman, included in your bill, H.R. 232, which passed the House February 6. It relates to a portion of the Florida National Cemetery, which opened in 1988 and was designed before legislation requiring upright markers went into effect. As part of the construction project, pre-placed graveliners were installed in one section of the cemetery. These are for graves measuring three feet by eight feet, an insufficient size to accommodate upright grave markers. Upright markers on that grave size would give a very cluttered appearance and would be difficult to maintain. Approximately two million dollars was invested in the pre-placed graveliners. Because of current law, NCS is not allowing interments in this section of the cemetery. We appreciate the action of the House in approving the use of flat markers in only that portion of the cemetery in order that that the land and the existing graveliners can be used. If this provision becomes law, veterans' families would be offered the option of burials in that section or in the remainder of the cemetery where upright markers will continue to be used. This section would be landscaped to be environmentally and visually complementary to the other developed portions of the cemetery.

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY

OFFICE OF ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF THE ARMY (CIVIL WORKS)

STATEMENT

OF

STEVEN DOLA

DEPUTY FOR MANAGEMENT AND BUDGET

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND MEMORIAL AFFAIRS

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ON THE OPERATION OF ARLINGTON NATIONAL CEMETERY

APRIL 18, 1991

STATEMENT OF STEVEN DOLA
DEPUTY FOR MANAGEMENT AND BUDGET
OFFICE OF ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF THE ARMY
(CIVIL WORKS)
BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND MEMORIAL AFFAIRS
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS, HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
ON THE OPERATION OF ARLINGTON NATIONAL CEMETERY

MR. CHAIRMAN AND MEMBERS OF THE SUBCOMMITTEE:

INTRODUCTION

I am pleased to be testifying before this subcommittee today on the operation of Arlington National Cemetery. I am the Deputy for Management and Budget, Office of Assistant Secretary of the Army (Civil Works). Assisting me today is Mr. John C. Metzler, Jr., Superintendent of Arlington National Cemetery. We are appearing on behalf of the Secretary of the Army, who is responsible for the operation and maintenance of Arlington and Soldiers' and Airmen's Home National Cemeteries.

My statement covers the following topics:

> Fiscal Year 1992 Cemeterial Expenses, Army, Budget;

> History;

> Eligibility;

> Interments and Inurnments;

> Construction Projects;

> Maintenance Responsibilities of National Park Service; and

> Status of Public Laws 100-322 and 101-237.

FISCAL YEAR 1992 CEMETERIAL EXPENSES, ARMY, BUDGET

The budget request for Fiscal Year 1992 is $12,587,000. The funds requested are sufficient to support the work force, to assure adequate maintenance of the buildings, and to acquire necessary supplies and equipment. The funds requested will finance operations at Arlington and Soldiers' and Airmen's Home National Cemeteries. Funding increases have been kept to a minimum and will provide adequate maintenance standards expected at these national shrines. Construction funds in the amount of $4,820,000 are included in the budget for a major project at Arlington National Cemetery -- the repair of rainwater leaks at the Memorial Amphitheater.

HISTORY

From its origin during the Civil War, Arlington National Cemetery has become a great national and military shrine. The 1,100 acre estate which comprises Arlington National Cemetery and the Fort Myer military reservation has a rich, historical background. It became the property of John Parke Custis in 1778 and descended to his son, George Washington Parke Custis, who built the handsome Greek revival mansion, now known as Arlington House. The grounds and house were owned by Robert E. Lee's family at the outbreak of the Civil War, when the house was taken over by the government for military purposes.

The establishment of the cemetery dates back to 1864. Over the years, representatives of all the Nation's wars and conflicts have been buried in Arlington National Cemetery. Among the more commonly known and deeply cherished memorials in Arlington National Cemetery are the Arlington Memorial Amphitheater and the Tomb of the Remains of Unknowns from World War I, World War II, Korea, and the Vietnam era.

Arlington National Cemetery has become this Nation's principal shrine to honor the men and women who served in the Armed Forces. It is a visible reflection of America's appreciation for those who have made the ultimate sacrifice to maintain our freedom. In addition to the thousands of funerals, with military honors, held there each year, hundreds of non-funeral ceremonies are conducted to honor those who rest in the cemetery. Thousands of visitors, both foreign and American, visit Arlington to participate in these events. During Fiscal Year 1990, about 1,900 ceremonies were conducted. Among the many distinguished participants were nineteen foreign Heads of State. In addition, Vice President J. Danforth Quayle participated in Memorial Day services in 1990. During Fiscal Year 1990, Arlington National Cemetery accommodated approximately 4 million visitors, making Arlington one of the most visited historic sites in the National Capital Region.

ELIGIBILITY

There has been no recent change in the interment eligibility criteria for Arlington National Cemetery. These criteria are stated in 32 CFR 553.15. The following categories of decedent are generally eligible:

> Members of the Armed Forces who die while serving on active duty.

> Former members of the Armed Forces who have retired with 20 or more years of active service or reserves.

> Honorably discharged veterans who have held certain high government positions.

> Honorably discharged veterans who have been awarded either the Medal of Honor, Distinguished Service Cross, Navy Cross, Air Force Cross, Distinguished Service Medal, Silver Star or the Purple Heart.

> Honorably discharged veterans separated prior to October 1, 1949, for medical reasons with a service connected disability rated at 30 percent or more.

> Family members such as spouses and children also are eligible under certain circumstances.

In addition to the above, any honorably discharged veteran whose remains have been cremated is eligible for inurnment in the Arlington National Cemetery Columbarium.

INTERMENTS AND INURNMENTS

In Fiscal Year 1990, there were 3,075 interments and 1,345 inurnments; and 3,225 interments and 1,425 inurnments are estimated in Fiscal Year 1991. It is noted in this regard that Arlington National Cemetery became the final resting place for 13 American servicemembers and one civilian who lost their lives in the Middle East during Operation Desert Storm.

Inurnment activities in the Columbarium continue to increase. In 1980, the first year of operation, there were 657 inurnments. Because of the advanced age of World War I and World War II Veterans, inurnments are now averaging approximately 1,400 per year. A new 10,000 niche addition to the Columbarium is essentially complete.

At the end of Fiscal Year 1990, there were 190,490 used gravesites to accommodate 208,186 interments. The total gravesite capacity is 267,961, leaving 77,471 gravesites available. Current projections indicate that all available gravesites will be used by the year 2025. The Department of the Army is cognizant of this projected closing date and remains alert to such possibilities as may present themselves for expansion of the capacity of the cemetery.

CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS

The new maintenance shops and warehouse facility requested in Fiscal Year 1991 is currently being designed and will replace buildings constructed in 1930. These were originally constructed as horse stables and converted to a cemetery maintenance facility in the late 1940s. They were not designed to house or service modern cemetery equipment; consequently, they are inadequate for those purposes. Moreover, the existing facility did not meet the current OSHA standards.

Construction of the new maintenance facility is forecast to begin in the spring of 1992; it will meet current building standards, and will be located so as to facilitate the efficient performance of the daily operations of the cemetery.

The Fiscal Year 1992 budget request, as indicated earlier in this statement, includes $4,820,000 for final design and repair of rainwater leaks at the Memorial Amphitheater. This renovation will take care of all water and moisture related problems that are causing accelerated deterioration of the marble cladding and damage to the interior finishes of the Amphitheater. The work includes replacing waterproofing membranes; cleaning, patching and repointing stonework; and replacing limited marble. Repairs are scheduled to begin in the fall of 1992 and be completed in late spring of 1994. As repairs proceed, it will be necessary to close some areas within the Memorial Amphitheater. Provisions will be made to ensure that Changing of the Guard ceremonies will continue. Also, appropriate agencies will be notified and the Cemetery has already begun planning alternate locations for ceremonies to minimize disruptions.

MAINTENANCE RESPONSIBILITIES OF NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Since our testimony last year, we have increased coordination with the Regional Director of the National Park Service regarding maintenance of Park Service property adjacent to Arlington National Cemetery. The trimming and pruning of the Holly hedge will be completed on a regular schedule. The light posts along Memorial Drive that required replacement have been repaired. Plans have been formulated between the National Park Service and Arlington National Cemetery to clean the granite work at the hemicycle at the gateway to Arlington National Cemetery.

STATUS OF PUBLIC LAWS 100-322 AND 101-237

Public Law 100-322 authorizes the Secretary of the Army to provide graveliners for graves in Arlington National Cemetery. Engineering cost effectiveness studies performed for the Veterans Administration by the New York City firm of Clarke and Rapuano, Inc., have indicated that, in cemeteries where burials exceed 500 - 600 per year, it appears reasonable to use graveliners. An evaluation is needed, however, to ascertain whether in the specific circumstances that exist in Arlington National Cemetery, graveliners would, in fact, be cost effective. Accordingly, we will consider during formulation of the Fiscal Year 1993 budget including funds for such an evaluation.

Public Law 101-237 requires the Secretary of the Army to designate an appropriate area within Arlington National Cemetery for the unmarked interment of ashes. The Army is committed to implementing this provision, and we anticipate conducting a concept design and feasibility study to evaluate the alternatives.

This completes my statement, Mr. Chairman. We will be pleased to respond to questions from the Subcommittee.

STATEMENT OF
BRUCE W. BURGESS
ASSOCIATE NATIONAL
LEGISLATIVE DIRECTOR
DISABLED AMERICAN VETERANS
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND MEMORIAL AFFAIRS
OF THE
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
APRIL 18, 1991

MR. CHAIRMAN AND MEMBERS OF THE SUBCOMMITTEE:

On behalf of the more than 1.3 million members of the Disabled American Veterans and its Ladies' Auxiliary, I thank you very much for this opportunity to express our views as part of your oversight of the Department of Veterans Affairs National Cemetery System -- in particular, its operational needs in view of existing fiscal restraints.

Additionally, you are exploring the possibility of transferring the operations of the National Cemetery System to the American Battle Monuments Commission. You have also asked to receive testimony on a proposal to create burial eligibility for members of the Selected Reserve who have served at least 20 years.

At the outset, Mr. Chairman, the DAV wishes to commend you on this timely exercise of your oversight responsibilities. Clearly, the efforts of this Subcommittee over the years have had a positive impact on the operations of the VA National Cemetery System. We applaud your continued interest to ensure that the ultimate benefit earned by former members of our Armed Forces is available for those who will choose to have this meaningful interment of their mortal remains.

Mr. Chairman, it has been nearly 128 years since President Lincoln signed into law a measure authorizing the purchase of land to inter the remains of individuals who die in military service while preserving the freedoms we enjoy today. More recently, Public Law 94-43, "The National Cemetery Act of 1973," established the current National Cemetery System, placing it under the direction of the VA.

Mr. Chairman, current eligibility for burial in a National Cemetery requires that a veteran be discharged or separated from active duty under conditions other than dishonorable and have completed the required period of active service. Service members who die on active duty are also eligible. Further, spouses and dependent children of eligible living and deceased veterans, as well as those of current and deceased armed forces members, may also be buried in a National Cemetery.

Mr. Chairman, as of September 30, 1990, there were 6,332,000 living ex-service members with peacetime service only. Eligible living veterans with wartime service include: 81,000 WWI veterans, 8,812,000 veterans of WWII, 4,812,000 Korean Conflict veterans and another 8,299,000 Vietnam Era veterans. There will be nearly 18 million cumulative veteran deaths -- more than 60% of all 28,336,000 currently living veterans -- between now and the year 2020. Though not all of these veterans will choose to be buried in a National Cemetery, the number of eligibles who could choose such interment is truly a staggering figure. Clearly, definite plans must be made now to meet the future demands on our National Cemetery System.

Last year, Mr. Chairman, H.R. 3706 was introduced by the Honorable Claude Harris, a distinguished member of the House

Veterans Affairs Committee. This measure proposed, in one of its provisions, providing eligibility for burial in National Cemeteries to those members of the Selected Reserve who served at least 20 years. As you know, the 101st Congress adjourned without acting on this measure.

Mr. Chairman, the DAV's legislative program is governed by mandate in the form of resolutions adopted by our membership at our annual DAV national convention. Since our membership has not adopted a resolution addressing the subject matter of providing National Cemetery eligibility for Selected Reserve members after 20 years of service, the DAV has no position regarding this measure.

Mr. Chairman, your Subcommittee is exploring the possibility of transferring the operations of the National Cemetery System to the American Battle Monuments Commission (ABMC). We find this to be an intriguing thought. After all, ever since its creation in 1923, the ABMC has been responsible for the perpetual care of many of our most prized war memorials as well as the overseas remains of 30,920 war dead from WWI; 93,240 from WWII plus 750 from the Mexican War of 1847. Even the missing in action are remembered. The names of our unrecovered missing comrades from all our wars are engraved on the Tablets of the Missing at the Commission's cemetery or monument closest to the location where they lost their lives. The ABMC has demonstrated expertise and excellence in its operations and we commend it most highly.

The mission of the ABMC was last expanded on October 1, 1979. At that time, it was given authority over the remains of 4,800 graves at Corozal American Cemetery in what had been the Panama Canal Zone.

However, Mr. Chairman, once again I must say that since at our most recent National Convention the delegates representing our national membership did not pass any resolutions concerning the transfer of operations of the National Cemetery System to the American Battle Monuments Commission, the DAV has no position regarding this matter.

Mr. Chairman, last year 464,643 veterans died, the VA interred 61,372 of those veterans and processed requests for 315,375 headstones or markers for burials outside the VA system. The remaining 137,896 received absolutely no benefit from the NCS. That means for everyone interred in the VA system there were more than seven veterans who chose to have their remains placed somewhere else. Perhaps the NCS is not providing the service to veterans it is supposed to if the vast majority of veterans choose <u>not</u> to use one of the National Cemeteries as their final resting place.

Mr. Chairman, at our most recent National Convention in Anaheim, California, our delegates adopted a resolution (copy attached) seeking at least one open National Cemetery in each state.

We believe the goal of this resolution is reasonable and pragmatic in establishing useful burial options for our nation's veterans, and we encourage the VA to consider this resolution when considering their National Cemetery System requirements for the future. We use the following information in support of this mandate from our membership.

Since 1973, the VA has developed a regional concept of siting and administering National Cemeteries nationwide. Currently, there are 113 cemeteries in the National Cemetery System. Of that number, only 64 are still open for burial. Information made available to us indicates that at least 20 of

the VA's current open National Cemeteries are scheduled to close during the next 30 years. Unfortunately, this is occurring at the same time our World War II veteran population approaches its peak years of need.

Mr. Chairman, as we understand it, the National Cemetery System continues to operate and make plans based on a revised regional concept designed to implement the "75/75 rule." The "75/75 rule" calls for locating cemeteries in proximity to our nation's population centers so that 75 percent of all eligible veterans will live no more than 75 miles from an open National Cemetery by the year 2000. Previous DAV testimony before this Subcommittee has expressed our views that a National Cemetery System policy based solely on the regional concept is unrealistic, especially in view of the fact that by the year 2000 more than one-half of our nation's veterans will reside more than 100 miles from an open National Cemetery. We believe the regional concept is less than optimally effective, since burial space is located many miles from at least 25 percent of the deceased veterans' families.

Mr. Chairman, the vast majority of Americans, we believe, prefer to inter the remains of family members close to their homes, even the 75 miles would be a burden to many families who live 55, 60 or 70 miles from the cemetery. In the western United States, there are many veterans who live hundreds of miles from a National Cemetery. We must keep in mind that only 39 states even have a National Cemetery and many of those are closed to new burials.

According to a 1987 VA report to Congress, many of our larger metropolitan areas are considered under-served by the regional policy. The report mentioned ten major metropolitan areas. One of them, Northern California, is about to open a new National Cemetery. It is ready to open in FY 1992 but the VA proposes to delay staffing it until FY 1993. An environmental assessment for an expansion of the Alexandria (Louisiana) Cemetery is underway. Planning and site acquisition for new cemeteries are underway in Albany, Chicago, Cleveland and the Seattle/Tacoma area. Also, advanced planning and an environmental impact statement are underway for a new National Cemetery in the Oklahoma City/Lawton area and in the Dallas/Fort Worth area. Detroit, Miami and Pittsburgh remain under-served with no proposed cemetery projects, to DAV's knowledge, planned in the near future.

Mr. Chairman, we understand it takes nearly seven years to complete a cemetery project from the conception stage, through the environmental impact study and construction. Given this time frame, and the fact that VA reports that even if they add the proposed ten cemeteries by 2000, there will be 20 fewer cemeteries open by the year 2020. Therefore, it seems vitally important that VA undertake a review and modification of their existing regional policy that will permit the National Cemetery System to serve those veterans entitled to burial.

We believe the present regional concept should be promptly and carefully reviewed by VA with an eye toward developing a strategic plan to site future National Cemeteries to accommodate the trends of our aging veteran population and projected closure of existing National Cemeteries. Additionally, we believe it important that Congress take prompt affirmative steps to fund new National Cemetery sites at the remaining nine most under-served metropolitan areas identified in VA's 1987 report to Congress.

We believe these steps are vital, Mr. Chairman, in order for the National Cemetery System to offer eligible veterans and their families realistic, effective burial options in the future.

Mr. Chairman, prior to commenting on the anticipated current and future needs of the National Cemetery System, in addition to site location, there are several observations that deserve mention:

- In FY 1984, the NCS maintained 1,552,010 graves with an average wage grade FTEE of 820 and interred 47,021 remains. The VA is now proposing for FY 1992 to maintain 1,930,730 graves while conducting 64,000 interments with a wage grade FTEE of 776.

- From 1984 to 1992, interment and gravesite maintenance workloads have increased by 36.1 percent and 24.8 percent respectively, while the wage grade FTEE will have declined 5.4 percent during the same period.

- The wage grade FTEE represents the workers doing the actual burials, upkeep, maintenance, etc. The FTEE total (including white collar workers) for the NCS, in FY 1992 is 1,200, a reduction of authorization for 37 FTEE from the current year. We understand that even this figure is deceptive since budget cuts have forced temporary hires and other stop gap measures. The average annual FTEE is actually below the authorized level. This reduction is a step in the wrong direction. We need more, not fewer, FTEE for the NCS, particularly at the wage grade level.

- The NCS standard for graves maintained is 1 FTEE for each 7,844.4 graves -- the actual level is 1 for each 11,215. The standard for grounds maintained is 1 per 10.7 acres -- the actual is 1 per 14.2.

- Interments are not static. We have already increased from 47,021 in 1984 to 61,372 last year. There are projected to be 64,060 interments next year with a rapid increase from the 70,700 projected for 1995 to 105,600 interments per year by the year 2010.

Mr. Chairman, we cannot ignore these figures. If we fail to plan properly and if we deny appropriate, necessary funding, our cemetery system will be beyond salvation.

Mr. Chairman, there are other steps that can be taken to ease the NCS burden. The VA should encourage more states to participate in the State Veterans' Cemetery Grants Program to allow veterans more options for burial. The State Cemetery Grants provide financial assistance on a 50-50 basis for states wishing to establish, improve, or expand their State Veterans' Cemeteries.

Mr. Chairman, a significant number of veterans are cremated each year. FY 1990 had 12,916 cremated remains handled by the NCS. Only six of the 113 National Cemeteries have Columbaria. This means the vast majority of these remains are buried. Some cemeteries have a garden niche program, others use a regular burial space. For those veterans choosing cremation, should we allow appropriate Columbaria to be erected in our National Cemeteries? Perhaps we could increase the life span of certain open cemeteries and possibly open some closed cemeteries if we allow the Columbaria option for those veterans who choose cremation.

Mr. Chairman, the VA has approached the DAV asking for our help in volunteer hours and donations of money and equipment to the NCS. The DAV has been given a list showing what pieces of equipment each National Cemetery requires. We are in the process of asking our members and state organizations to donate what they can to the NCS. The NCS does have a gift fund in

place and these donations will be considered a gift to the federal government.

Mr. Chairman, we are doing this because we recognize the need. Most National Cemeteries have had to severely cut back, or eliminate, routine maintenance and upkeep. In fact, already volunteers of all kinds are donating time at our National Cemeteries. The three NCS regions had a combined 148,281 volunteer hours in FY 1990. The Southern Region led the NCS with over 71,000 volunteer hours. At the Memphis, Tennessee National Cemetery last year, 3,615 Boy Scouts painted road dividers, planted trees and shrubs and mulched flower beds. Even the Riverside, California National Cemetery had 6,500 volunteer hours.

Mr. Chairman, what has the government of the most powerful country in the world come to when it must rely on children and donated time and money to buy the equipment that will be needed to accord veterans a proper burial? Of all the rights that our veterans have earned, surely the right to a decent burial and care of their remains is something this government can afford.

Mr. Chairman, the DAV understands the reality of budget constraints but we are here today to tell you that an emergency exists in our National Cemetery System. Additional funding is vital if the System is to provide meaningful, dignified service to our nation's veterans and their families.

Mr. Chairman, as you know all equipment has a certain useful life. It can be repaired for a while, but there comes a point where it becomes cheaper to sell or discard old equipment and buy new, rather than to keep wasting dollars in repair and downtime maintaining obsolete equipment. The NCS has over 8,000 major pieces of equipment in inventory with a value of over $21 million. Through an extensive maintenance program, this equipment longevity has been extended an average of five years beyond its scheduled replacement date. To keep this system productive, let's keep the equipment useful.

Mr. Chairman, lets "fix what's broke" before buying another band-aid. We appreciate your Subcommittee recommending additional funds to "fix" the system, get rid of the backlog of equipment and other problems. The ideal solution would be to secure a one-time allocation of enough funds to clear up the entire backlog. Then we could stick to a realistic budget to run the NCS on an annual basis.

There is no doubt, Mr. Chairman, that operation of the National Cemetery System has been adversely affected by prior Administration budget submissions. This is illustrated by the current $8.4 million backlog in equipment and the $1.2 million in deferred maintenance and repair projects.

The Independent Budget, which the DAV helped author, recommends an $18.4 million increase above the FY 1991 appropriated level. This should go a long way toward clearing the entire equipment backlog, as well as most deferred maintenance items and allow additional FTEE.

Mr. Chairman, the results of the past budget deficits are painfully evident in the 20 acre section of the Riverside, California Cemetery that you described as looking like a "bomb-scarred battlefield," with hundreds upon hundreds of gravesites sinking into various stages of disrepair.

Mr. Chairman, we too have viewed the color photographs of Riverside National Cemetery. Frankly, the color we see is RED. One cannot help but get angry. While gazing on this grassless cemetery that is pockmarked by small craters produced

by shifting, sinking earth, highlighted by exposed grave markers that are all but disappearing into a chasm of red mud, our stomachs turn and our minds reel. These conditions are truly shameful!

Mr. Chairman, how did this happen? We understand it was because the VA could not afford to repair the equipment used to prepare the earth properly following each interment. Nor was there money to fertilize, weed, water and generally maintain the gravesites. Whatever the cause, we cannot allow our National Cemeteries to resemble potter's fields.

The National Cemetery System should be the crown jewel of the VA. Our National Cemetery System is charged with maintaining the honor of our fallen comrades in perpetuity. These cemeteries will live on as a lasting sign of a grateful nation's final gift to those who served her so well in her times of need. Let us strive to make sure this jewel will forever shine like the precious diamond it should be.

That concludes my testimony, Mr. Chairman. I will be pleased to respond to any questions you or the Subcommittee members may have.

RESOLUTION NO. 285
LEGISLATIVE

TO PROVIDE FOR A NATIONAL CEMETERY IN EVERY STATE

WHEREAS, there are many states and regions of the United States without National Cemetery facilities; and

WHEREAS, federal and state land ideally suited for cemetery development is available in many states; and

WHEREAS, veterans should be entitled to burial in a National Cemetery reasonably close to their homes; and

WHEREAS, VA's current policy of regionalization does not always insure that eligible deceased veterans can be interred close to their families; NOW

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Disabled American Veterans in National Convention assembled in Anaheim, California, July 29-August 2, 1990, support legislation to provide for at least one open National Cemetery in each state to insure that all veterans may be buried in a National Cemetery reasonably close to their homes.

* * *

Non Commissioned Officers Association of the United States of America
225 N. Washington Street • Alexandria, Virginia 22314 • Telephone (703) 549-0311

Statement of
Richard W. Johnson
Director of Legislative Affairs
and
Richard C. Schneider
Deputy Director of Legislative Affairs
before the
Subcommittee on Housing and Memorial Affairs
Committee on Veterans Affairs
on
The National Cemetery System
April 18, 1991

Chartered by the United States Congress

Mr. Chairman, The Non Commissioned Officers Association of the USA (NCOA) sincerely appreciates this opportunity to comment on the future of the National Cemetery System. Under specific consideration by the committee are proposals to transfer responsibility for system operations to the American Battle Monuments Commission; special system needs during this period of fiscal restraint; and, whether to extend burial eligibility to retired and retirement eligible reservists. Before addressing these subjects, it is important to examine the National Cemetery System from an historical perspective.

BACKGROUND

The National Cemetery System can trace its origins to War Department General Order No. 75 of September 11, 1861 and a subsequent act of Congress approved by President Abraham Lincoln the following year. Through the course of time responsibility for system operation has flowed from the now defunct War Department to the Army and the National Park Service finally finding a home with the Veterans Administration in 1972. Each responsible agency has taken seriously its obligation to the system thus providing that since their creation, National Cemeteries have served as a benchmark of what a perpetual care cemetery should be.

Yet today the system is in crisis, seriously undersized, underfunded, understaffed, and underequipped to properly maintain itself and meet the burial needs of veterans and their families.

TRANSFER TO ABMC

Ten years ago, transferring responsibility from the VA to the American Battle Monuments Commission (ABMC) would never have been considered. The VA was running the best cemetery system in the country with the most modern equipment, excellent funding and staffing. Congress, the VA, the President and even veterans organizations must all share in the responsibility for current deficiencies in the system. But, is transferring the cemetery system to the ABMC the answer? NCOA does not believe that it is time yet.

Transferring system responsibility to ABMC would probably have the desired effect of returning the National Cemetery System to the showpiece of respect for deceased veterans it once was. However, such a transfer would be costly, would create a whole new bureaucracy with which veterans and survivors must contend, and would be more expensive than repairing the system as it currently stands. NCOA certainly appreciates the concept and the motivation of those who have suggested such a move. Accordingly, we reserve the right to endorse the concept at some future point, but for now, we believe a concerted effort on the part of the Administration, the Department, Congress and the veterans organizations can revive the system.

CEMETERY POLICY

The first step on the road to renovation of the cemetery system is recognizing its sizing deficiency. A study conducted in 1972 suggested the creation of regional cemeteries as the only form of system growth. It replaced a less desirable political growth system, but reliance on regional cemeteries to serve the needs of a majority of veterans is just not adequate. According to National Cemetery System Director Jo Ann K. Webb:

> o **Not one of the ten regional cemeteries buries veterans from a multistate region.**
>
> o **Not one of the ten regional cemeteries actually buries people from throughout a**

state.

o Veterans and their families generally travel no more than 75 miles to bury and visit their dead.

o The regional cemeteries were not located to serve major veteran population centers, but where land was free.

Congress recognized the inadequacy of the regional cemetery concept several years ago. In response it embarked on a road of reasonable expansion as suggested in the 1987 cemetery system study. That report recommended putting smaller cemeteries in ten major veteran population centers. Toward meeting this goal Congress directed the construction of a new cemetery in northern California and provided funding for environmental impact studies in five other areas where cemeteries were deemed by the study to be needed. Here is where system expansion begins to fall apart.

Notwithstanding Secretary Derwinski's very positive statements that the Department's goal is to provide that ". . . **by the turn of the century, three out of four veterans will live no further than 75 miles from an open national cemetery.** . ." there has been no formal change in expansion policy. The Regional Cemetery system, as it was approved in the 1970's, is complete and current policy allows for no further expansion. As a result, according to agency memorandums, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) continually rejects the submission of environmental impact statements and construction proposals because they are inconsistent with policy related to the already completed Regional Cemetery system. Moreover, OMB will not allow the Department to program funds for environmental impact statements, land acquisition or construction that is not consistent with the "current" regional cemetery plan. Therefore the policy must change. If the Department is unwilling or unable because of OMB restriction to modify the regional cemetery policy, then Congress must assume upon itself this role.

NCS FUNDING

As mentioned earlier, the blame for underfunding and understaffing the National Cemetery System must be widely spread. The Department, Congress and veterans organizations, including NCOA have focused great effort towards improvements in medical care, maintenance in compensation programs and other efforts in recent years giving only casual consideration to the needs of the cemetery system.

As a result over the past few years internments have increased 35.4 percent and grave site maintenance has increased 19.1 percent while staffing over the same period has increased only 2.8 percent. Unfortunately, the Administration budget proposal calls for additional staffing reductions. Concurrently, the Administration's own projections suggest the system will face an ever-increasing workload through the year 2010 significantly taxing the Department's ability to meet the burial needs of veterans.

Compounding the burial space and staffing shortages is the backlog in equipment replacement and maintenance. According to the Independent Budget of Veterans Organizations, endorsed by NCOA, and acknowledged in the Annual Report of the Advisory Committee on Cemeteries and Memorials, the National Cemetery System is facing a current equipment replacement, repair and maintenance backlog of more than $11 million. None of that money is funded in the current budget or proposed for 1992.

These critical funding shortages manifest in several ways. Perhaps most importantly they adversely affect employee morale

and retention. Additionally they can be observed by the public in areas where the grass is brown, trees and shrubs are untrimmed, grave markers are not level or are becoming overgrown with foliage. Altogether, the situation is unacceptable.

To accommodate budget shortfalls in recent years non-disabled veterans have sacrificed burial allowances, funeral plot allowances and most recently grave marker allowances. NCOA believes this is sacrifice enough. Veterans should not have to sacrifice cemeteries as well.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For now, NCOA recommends retention of the National Cemetery System within the Department of Veterans Affairs. The association believes this to be most cost effective and believes the agency deserves some protection from the loss as the major provider of veterans services.

As with most problems suffered in veterans programs, the most immediate and permanent solution to this problem is to properly fund the system, not just for operations and maintenance, but also for acquisition and construction. Veterans deserve a decent burial in a properly maintained, perpetual care, national cemetery.

Currently fewer than half of all veterans live within the Secretary's 75 mile goal. To expand the population coverage to meet the Secretary's goal, Congress and the Administration must work together. NCOA encourages and supports this effort.

RESERVE ELIGIBILITY

Finally NCOA is pleased to offer its full support to the concept of allowing retired and retirement eligible reservists burial access in national cemeteries. If this benefit were extended to reserves, 267,000 would become eligible for burial.

Reservists and Guardsmen have demonstrated their incredible worth as a part of the total force concept under which the armed forces now operates. Their service should be rewarded not just with burial plot eligibility but also with a Flag to drape their casket. Hopefully the committee will move swiftly to authorize these benefits.

OTHER COMMENTS

Two additional observations are shared for consideration.

First, it is appropriate for NCOA to note the projected closure of two significant military installations that have tremendous potential for the NCS. These are Ft. Sheridan and the Presidio. Both are within major metropolitan population centers. Using the Secretaries' 75 mile service goal, both have the potential to provide maximum support for veterans and their survivors. Uniquely, the Presidio's existing hospital could also benefit well the Veterans Administrator's medical care system. We would strongly advocate the transfer of selected land and facilities from both Ft. Sheridan and the Presidio to the VA for the NCS. We would further recommend that the Presidio hospital facilities be transferred to the VA medical care system. We should not forfeit the opportunity to utilize these existing cost effective assets.

Secondly, NCOA recalls that Congress in 1987 funded and requested four environmental impact studies in support of the NCS for Cleveland, Dallas, Albany, and Seattle. These four locations were Congressionally mandated above and beyond the original committee request. It is our understanding that although the

work was completed, OMB has never released the results of these studies. It appears that these impact statements were determined by OMB to be beyond the scope of the current regional cemetery plan - hence, not released. Isn't it time that this Subcommittee and America's Veterans have the results of these studies which may help influence the future planning direction for the NCS.

Thank you.

Statement of

The American Legion

1608 K STREET, N. W.
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20006

by

FRANK C. BUXTON, DEPUTY DIRECTOR
NATIONAL VETERANS AFFAIRS AND REHABILITATION COMMISSION
THE AMERICAN LEGION

before the

SUBCOMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND MEMORIAL AFFAIRS
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

on

OVERSIGHT OF VA'S NATIONAL CEMETERY SYSTEM

APRIL 18, 1991

STATEMENT OF FRANK C. BUXTON, DEPUTY DIRECTOR
NATIONAL VETERANS AFFAIRS AND REHABILITATION COMMISSION
THE AMERICAN LEGION
BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND MEMORIAL AFFAIRS
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
APRIL 18, 1990

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

The American Legion welcomes this opportunity to provide its views on programs conducted by the Department of Veterans Affairs with respect to the National Cemetery System (NCS). We appreciate the support this Subcommittee and the Committee on Veterans Affairs have provided to the NCS over the years. Without your consistent advocacy and dedication, the funding and operational concerns faced by the NCS today would no doubt be much greater.

Mr. Chairman, the American Legion is greatly alarmed by the operational deficiencies which currently exist within NCS. These deficiencies are primarily budget driven. In our view, the administration of NCS programs, and the commitment to perform the mission of the NCS, has never been more capable. Still, those individuals responsible for day-to-day NCS operations, can only be as efficient and effective as resources permit. Of all the programs administered by VA, restoring the health and vitality of the National Cemetery System would be one of the easiest to accomplish in terms of increased funding.

The American Legion believes that the proposed NCS operational budget for FY 1992 will be short approximately $15 to $20 million and 179 full time equivalent employees. The National Cemetery System remains committed to providing dignified burials and proper perpetual care to all eligible beneficiaries. However, without a substantial increase in funding and an increase in employment levels, some services will have to be reduced starting in FY 1992.

Proper maintenance of gravesites will suffer, while burials could be limited to only certain days of the week. Since 1984, the annual number of interments in national cemeteries have increased from 48,000 to 62,000. Additionally, VA now maintains perpetual care for close to 2 million gravesites. Equipment in many cases is inadequate and obsolete, while the existing replacement equipment backlog is estimated at $8 million. In order to achieve an adequate budget appropriation for FY 1992 and the out-years, as mentioned, Congress must provide a one-time increase of between $15 to $20 million and then annually adjust for cost inflation and expanding workloads.

Mr. Chairman, the most active national cemeteries at Riverside, CA and Calverton, NY desperately require additional resources and augmentation to existing staff levels. The new VA national cemetery in Arizona will require an additional $500,000 and 8 full-time employees during FY 1992, for which no funds are proposed. The new San Joaquin Valley National Cemetery in northern California, which has been scheduled to open on Veterans Day, 1991, will have to be delayed one full year due to insufficient resources.

Mr. Chairman, we realize the profile we present on the condition of the NCS is not pleasant. In a time of constrained Federal resources we know some budget sacrifices must be made. However, providing a no growth budget, with a reduction of 37 full-time employees for a system which is already realizing major funding problems, is simply unsupportable. The American Legion believes that due to the many sacrifices already made by veterans, the responsibility of the Federal government in providing proper perpetual care must be met in a noble manner.

At the Riverside National Cemetery, many problems have recently occurred with respect to sunken gravesites. A case can be made that due to poor soil conditions and periodic excessive rainfall, providing proper maintenance of gravesites is a significant challenge. It must also be considered to what extent equipment downtime contributes to the problem. We have been apprised that the equipment required to properly settle fresh gravesites was inoperable for a good portion of 1990. In turn, this situation has contributed to the current crises at Riverside. Many of the problems at the cemetery are attributed to a simple lack of maintenance due to inadequate staffing, not only the result of torrential downpours.

It has been estimated by VA officials that at least an additional $ 1 million is required at the Riverside cemetery for essential equipment, labor and supplies. The American Legion realizes that crisis situations do not exist at all VA national cemeteries. We also know that essential corrections in many locations are long overdue and that proper funding now can prevent crises from occuring later.

The American Legion concurs with the NCS decision to seek development of new national cemeteries in current underserved locations. During 1990, VA had 62,000 interments and projects 71,300 interments by 1995. The process of development for new national cemeteries continues.

In addition to the new San Joaquin Valley location, five additional sites have completed Environmental Impact Studies (EIS), and of these sites three locations have progressed to the site selection process. These are Dallas, TX; Albany, NY; and Cleveland, OH. Of the other two sites, which have completed the EIS phase, Seattle, WA; and Chicago, IL are the closest to completing the site selection process. Funding has also been provided to begin the EIS phase of new cemetery development in Oklahoma City, OK; and Pittsburgh, PA. EIS initiatives are still planned for Miami, FL; and Detriot, MI.

The American Legion is thus far pleased with the progress being made with regard to national cemetery expansion. We believe it is within the purview of the Veterans Affairs Committees of Congress to provide oversight relative to the appropriate development of national veterans cemeteries. Based upon what we hear from many veterans families, it is not desirable to have to travel over 75 miles to bury their loved ones, or to visit the gravesites to pay respect to the deceased veterans. In addition to properly funding the current national cemetery system, new construction and operational funding will be required to proceed with the expansion of the National Cemetery System.

Mr. Chairman, in addition to the responsibilities of new interments and the maintenance of existing gravesites, there are two other NCS programs which deserve recognition. These are the Monument Service and the State Cemetery Grants Program.

In Fiscal year 1990, the NCS had approximately 62,000 interments. During this period, the Monument Service processed applications for roughly 290,000 markers. The difference in workload lies in the fact that the Monument Service must process requests from all veteran applicants, whether buried in a national cemetery, a state cemetery, or in a civilian cemetery. At this time, The American Legion is not aware of any significant problems associated with the monument program and commends the Monument Service for its impressive achievements.

The VA State Cemetery Grants Program, designed to complement VA's National Cemetery System, provides up to half the cost needed to build, expand or improve state veterans cemeteries. In the 10 years of its operation, the program has awarded 52 grants, totaling nearly $25 million, to 16 states and Guam to support 22 cemeteries. Counting both participating and nonparticipating States, there are 48 state owned veterans cemeteries in 29 States.

Since the inception of the program, the State Veterans Cemeteries, which have been VA grant assisted have provided burials to 42,484 veterans and 52,706 dependents. Currently the program has 395,380 developed gravesites on 432 acres. An additional 1,552 acres of undeveloped land is included within existing total acreage available to the State Cemeteries. At the present time pending applications for grant assistance exceeds available matching funds. The State Cemetery Grants Program has been projected to be funded at approximately $4.5 million per year thru FY 1994. At this level, the current number of applications on hand will not be funded in a timely manner.

The American Legion strongly supports the continued development of the State Cemetery Grants Program. This program is an excellent complement to national cemeteries. More state veterans cemeteries, in conjunction with national cemeteries, can help achieve VA's goal of providing open veterans cemeteries within 75 miles driving distance to 75% of the veteran population by the year 2000.

Mr. Chairman, we also wish to comment on the 1990 Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act and its impact on veterans plot allowances and headstone allowances. The 1990 Veterans Benefits and Services Conference Agreement eliminated the plot allowance of $150, which was paid to all honorably discharged wartime veterans and eliminated the headstone allowance of $85, which was paid to all eligible veterans in lieu of a Government provided headstone or marker. The 1990 Conference Agreement

limited the plot allowance benefit to veterans who are indigent or are in receipt of VA disability compensation or pension payments. The plot allowance would still be payable to State Veterans Cemeteries. While veterans would still be entitled to receive a Government - provided headstone or marker for their interment site, the headstone or marker allowance would be eliminated entirely.

Mr. Chairman, these actions are in direct violation of a longstanding principle held by The American Legion, which calls for equal benefits for equal service. Delegates to the 1990 American Legion National Convention approved Resolution No. 488 and Resolution No. 515, which are related to the VA National Cemetery System. Resolution No. 448 opposes any legislative or administration proposal that would amend the eligibility criteria for the plot allowance consistent with the requirements for burial allowance. Resolution No. 515 places The American Legion in a position to sponsor and support legislation to restore the burial allowance as a benefit to be provided for the burial of all honorably discharged war veterans, and provided further that this burial allowance shall not be in an amount less than $400.

Prior to 1981, a burial allowance of up to $300 was provided in all cases where a veteran died: first, of a service-connected disability; second, if he or she was a veteran of any war; third, if they were discharged for a disability incurred or aggravated in the line of duty; or fourth, if the veteran was in receipt of, or entitled to, disability compensation. Since 1981, the veterans' burial allowance was decreased significantly by limiting the benefit to veterans receiving pension or disability compensation benefits, or residing in a VA supported health facility at the time of their death. The American Legion supports recently introduced legislation, which would restore the pre-1981 burial allowance and increase the burial benefit to $400, and restore and increase the plot allowance from $150 to $300. Additionally, we would support the restoration of eligibility for a Government furnished headstone or marker to the pre-1990 Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act criteria.

Mr. Chairman, The American Legion does not support the decision to reduce eligibility for burial and plot allowances or to restrict eligibility for Government furnished headstones allowances. Thousands of war veterans never approach the Department of Veterans Affairs for any kind of benefit during their lifetime, and for these veterans, the only recognition received for honorable service has been the various burial benefits provided upon their death. To The American Legion the elimination of the aforementioned burial benefits for the majority of war veterans is a serious matter, deserving of attention and reinstatement by Congress.

The American Legion is gratified that NCS is projected to receive roughly $3 million in the FY 1991 Operation Desert Storm supplemental appropriation. Of this amount, $1 million will be targeted to improve certain conditions at the Riverside National Cemetery. We believe the $3 million supplemental add-on should become a recurring appropriation in FY 1992. Also, new staff hired through this appropriation should become permanent employees. Of the total amount of additional funds realized by NCS during FY 1991 (including the $3 million supplemental), roughly $1.8 million of the $4.3 million add-on has been directed to correcting the infrastructure of the Riverside National Cemetery.

Mr. Chairman, in regard to the subject of transfering operations of the NCS to the American Battle Monument Commission (ABMC), our judgement is that the consolidation of AMBC and NCS would not be practical or efficient.

First, the NCS and the ABMC have entirely different missions. The ABMC maintains inactive overseas cemeteries that are essentially memorials for American Veterans who fell and were buried on foreign soil. The NCS operates active cemeteries, burying more than 60,000 persons per year and issuing close to 300,000 grave markers and headstones per year. The NCS also receives administrative, fiscal and logistic support from the VA medical centers; the support could be complicated if NCS was not part of VA.

In our view, the concept of moving NCS elsewhere actually reflects widespread dissatisfaction with the resource support for the national cemeteries while NCS has been part of the Veterans Administration and now the Department of Veterans Affairs. The deterioration of national cemeteries is the result of the absence of attention and support within VA and within the Administration, particularly the chronic lack of support for the budget and manpower resources required to operate and maintain the cemeteries.

Moving NCS out of VA may not be the best solution. We believe adequate resourcing is the essential solution, regardless of where the NCS is located.

Therefore, we strongly recommend that Congress establish a separate appropriation for the operation and maintenance of national cemeteries rather than permitting the resources for the cemeteries to be mixed with the General Operating Expense (GOE) appropriation.

A separate appropriation would give Congress clear visibility and control over the funds specifically allocated for the cemeteries, and would also facilitate Congressional oversight concerning the use of those resources.

There are examples of Congress establishing separate appropriations to attain the ends suggested. An applicable example is the appropriation that supports Arlington National Cemetery, that is called "Cemetery Expenses - Department of the Army". Although part of the Military District of Washington and under the Department of the Army, funds for Arlington National Cemetery are separated, clearly visible, and are examined discretely each year by Congressional Committees.

In summary, a separate appropriation is also only an expression of dissastisfaction with the sustained lack of adequate resource support for the national cemeteries. If VA and the Adminstration would ask Congress for sufficient resources, no organizational or appropriation changes would be necessary. However, given the experience of almost 20 years under VA, we are not optimistic, and therefore urge closer Congressional oversight through the mandate of a separate appropriation.

Mr. Chairman, that concludes our statement. We thank the Subcommittee for receiving our views.

their spouses and certain dependents) and to permanently maintain these graves; second, to mark graves of eligible persons in national and private cemeteries, upon proper application; and third, to administer the Grant program for aid to states in establishing, expanding or improving state veterans' cemeteries.

The Administration requested Budget Authority of $57.3 million for FY 1992. This submission was to provide resources which address the critical maintenance and repair project needs for maintaining the National Cemetery System's approximately 400 buildings and 100 miles of roads. It also is programmed to provide for the partial replacement of essential operations equipment.

The equipment inventory totals over 8,000 pieces of equipment with an estimated value of $21 million. The National Cemetery System is experiencing a steady workload growth. Interments are expected to increase from 63,000 in 1991 to 64,000 in 1992 with gravesites maintained to increase from 1.8 to 1.9 million.

Mr. Chairman, the Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs' recommended an increase of $20 million for NCS. The House Committee on Veterans Affairs' recommended that NCS funding be increased by $11 million. The VSO's Independent Budget recommended an $18 million increase in funding to better address equipment and maintenance backlogs.

PVA continues to advocate for the location of a DVA cemetery in every state and a national cemetery within reasonable driving distance of each major veterans population center. Public Law 95-476, enacted October 18, 1978, as codified in Title 38, U.S.C., 1008, established authority to provide aid to states for establishment, expansion, and improvement of veterans' cemeteries. This program is under the direction of the Director of the National Cemetery System.

The State Veterans' Cemetery Grants Program makes grants to any state to assist such state in establishing, expanding, or improving state-owned veterans' cemeteries. States receive financial assistance to provide burial space for veterans and serve to enhance the National Cemetery System. The cemeteries are operated and permanently maintained by the states. A grant may not exceed 50 percent of the total value of the land and the cost of improvements.

The remaining amount must be contributed by the state. The 1992 funding request for the State Cemetery Grant Program is $5.1 million, with eight states requesting grants. Since the establishment of this program over eleven years ago, a total of $40.6 million has been appropriated through 1991. It is only fitting and deserving that veterans of this Nation be laid to rest near their family and loved ones.

Of the one hundred and thirteen cemeteries which are included in the National Cemetery System, located in thirty-nine states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico, thirty-six are either closed or will be closed to new internments by the end of 1991 due to lack of space.

As of the end of September 30, 1990, thirty-three state national cemeteries were available for internment. However, fifteen of these will be closed to new internments by the end of 1991 and twenty-four will be closed to new internments due to lack of space by the turn of the century. The need for a significant increase in available and accessible gravesites is obvious.

We do encourage the efforts to expand the grant programs for state veterans' cemeteries. However, these efforts alone will not adequately provide for the final need of all veterans. A combined federal/state effort is helpful. But, it should be the primary

PARALYZED VETERANS
OF AMERICA
Chartered by the Congress
of the United States

STATEMENT OF

CLIFTON E. DUPREE, ASSOCIATE LEGISLATIVE DIRECTOR

PARALYZED VETERANS OF AMERICA

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND MEMORIAL AFFAIRS

OF THE

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

CONCERNING

OVERSIGHT OF THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

NATIONAL CEMETERY SYSTEM, ARLINGTON NATIONAL CEMETERY

THE AMERICAN BATTLE MONUMENTS COMMISSION

APRIL 18, 1991

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee, it is a pleasure and personal privilege to appear here today on behalf of Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA), a Congressionally chartered veterans' service organization. PVA appreciates this opportunity to present our views concerning oversight of the Department of Veterans Affairs' (DVA) National Cemetery System (NCS) and the policy changes that have occurred since 1973 as they relate to serving the veteran population. Your efforts to seek justification for what the long range plans should be is also appreciated.

A rapidly aging veteran population calls for expansion and improvement of the Department of Veterans Affairs' National Cemetery System. For over two hundred years this Nation has provided suitable final resting places for the men and women who served in our Armed Forces. This tradition must be protected and continued. To do otherwise would be to break a long-standing national commitment and demean the sacrifices of our veterans.

In response to two specific legislative proposals contained in your letter of invitation, PVA opposes transferring the operations of the National Cemetery System to the American Battle Monuments Commission. The operations and management of the National Cemetery System really has not been the problem with the NCS. The lack of appropriate funding support the NCS receives continues to be the problem. Transferring the NCS to the ABMC would not change the funding needs required to keep the NCS operational. However, we support the proposal to create burial eligibility to members of the Selected Reserve who have served at least 20 years, provided they have served on active duty. Veterans who have served on active duty should still have to have priority for burial.

The National Cemetery System (NCS) administers a threefold mission: First, to provide, upon request, for internment in any national cemetery with available grave space the remains of eligible deceased servicepersons and discharged veterans (together with

Resolution No. 752

SECURE NATIONAL CEMETERY IN BOSSIER CITY, LOUISIANA

WHEREAS, it is quite evident that a need exists in North Louisiana for a National Cemetery; and

WHEREAS, the average age of the World War II veteran is now in excess of 65 years old; and

WHEREAS, Barksdale Air Force Base in Bossier City, Louisiana, has untold acres of land which are not utilized for military purposes; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the 91st National Convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we urge the United States Congress to designate a portion of the available federal land at Barksdale Air Force Base as a National Cemetery.

Adopted by the 91st National Convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, held in Baltimore, Maryland, August 17-24, 1990.

Resolution No. 752

Resolution No. 735

RESTORE ENTITLEMENT TO THE VA BURIAL ALLOWANCE

WHEREAS, Public Law 97-35 terminated entitlement to the VA nonservice connected burial allowance to the survivors of certain wartime veterans who, at the time of death, were not in receipt of VA disability compensation pension or military retirement pay; and

WHEREAS, the denial of the VA's nonservice connected burial allowance to the survivors of wartime veterans can cause financial hardship for these survivors; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the 91st National Convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we support legislation that would authorize VA nonservice connected burial benefit entitlement to the survivors of all wartime veterans.

Adopted by the 91st National Convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, held in Baltimore, Maryland, August 17-24, 1990.

Resolution No. 735

Resolution No. 712

ACQUIRE FORT SHERIDAN SITE FOR NATIONAL CEMETERY

WHEREAS, the Congress of the United States of America appropriated funds for an environmental impact study for a feasible location for a Veterans National Cemetery near Chicago, Illinois, under H.R. B4345; and

WHEREAS, according to the Department of Veterans Affairs, in order to satisfy the burial needs of over seven hundred seventy four thousand (774,000) eligible veterans, their spouses and eligible family members living in the Northeast Quadrant of Illinois, at least three hundred twenty-five (325) acres of land will be needed; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the 91st National Convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States petition the Congress of the United States of America an the Secretary of the Department of Defense to deed three hundred twenty-five (325) acres of Fort Sheridan land to the Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs for a National Cemetery for veterans at Fort Sheridan, Illinois.

Adopted by the 91st National Convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, held in Baltimore, Maryland, August 17-24, 1990.

Resolution No. 712

Resolution No. 682

ADDITION TO THE LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA NATIONAL CEMETERY

WHEREAS, for nearly 14 years there has not been any burial space at the Los Angeles National Cemetery, located at 950 South Sepulveda Boulevard, Los Angeles, California, to provide burial for those eligible veterans and/or dependents of the over 1 million veterans residing in the Los Angeles area; and

WHEREAS, there is an existing 109 acres of land at the VA Medical Center, located at West Los Angeles, and a portion of this property could be used very economically for the extension of the present National Cemetery; and

WHEREAS, this Department of Veterans Affairs property is restricted for its use by a grant given by the John P. Jones and Arcadia B. DeBaker in the year 1888; in which this use would be in compliance of; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the 91st National Convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that legislation be advanced that would authorize the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to utilize a portion of this land to extend the present national cemetery boundaries at West Los Angeles, California, to provide burial for those eligible veterans residing in this area.

Adopted by the 91st National Convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, held in Baltimore, Maryland, August 17-24, 1990.

Resolution No. 682

Resolution No. 681

NATIONAL CEMETERY PRESIDIO

WHEREAS, a commission on military base realignment and closure, chartered by the Secretary of Defense and endorsed by the United States Congress has recommended the closure of the U.S. Army base located at The Presidio, San Francisco, California; and

WHEREAS, Congress has previously ruled that The Presidio property, when no longer needed by the Department of Defense, will be transferred to the Golden Gate National Recreation area of the U.S. National Park Service; and

WHEREAS, located within the boundaries of The Presidio is the San Francisco National Cemetery, which is currently without available burial sites; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the 91st National Convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that in the event of the closure of the U.S. Army base, Presidio, San Francisco, that we seek the reopening of the San Francisco National Cemetery to allow additional burial sites for veterans and their spouses.

Adopted by the 91st National Convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, held in Baltimore, Maryland, August 17-24, 1990.

Resolution No. 681

Resolution No. 627

MEDAL OF HONOR BURIAL TRANSPORTATION ENTITLEMENTS

WHEREAS, authorization for the issuance of the Medal of Honor award to members of the Armed Forces of the United States to honor and pay tribute to those who performed a deed of personal bravery or self-sacrifice above and beyond the call of duty as signed into law by President Abraham Lincoln on December 21, 1861; and

WHEREAS, the Department of Veterans Affairs regulations could preclude Medal of Honor recipients from burial in Arlington National Cemetery or other national cemeteries due to lack of financial resources needed to pay transportaion costs; and

WHEREAS, the Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs cannot authorize payment of transportation to these veterans who have the highest priority for burial in a national cemetery; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the 91st National Convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we request legislation be enacted to authorize the Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs to pay for deceased Medal of Honor recipients' transportation costs from the place of death to Arlington National Cemetery or other national cemetery of choice for burial without regard to current eligibility restrictions.

Adopted by the 91st National Convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, held in Baltimore, Maryland, August 17-24, 1990.

Resolution No. 627

Resolution No. 624

PROVIDE FOR AN OPEN NATIONAL CEMETERY IN EVERY STATE

WHEREAS, there are many states and regions of the United States without an open veterans cemetery; and

WHEREAS, federal and state land ideally suited for cemetery development is available in many states; and

WHEREAS, veterans should be entitled to burial in a veterans cemetery reasonably close to their homes; and

WHEREAS, Department of Veterans Affairs current policies of regionalization and state grants do not always ensure that eligible veterans can be interred close to their families; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the 91st National Convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that we support legislation which would provide at least one open national cemetery in each state to ensure that all veterans may be buried reasonably close to their families.

Adopted by the 91st National Convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, held in Baltimore, Maryland, August 17-24, 1990.

Resolution No. 624

Resolution No. 623

BURIAL PLOT ALLOWANCE

WHEREAS, the burial plot allowance was enacted into law in 1973 to provide payment of a plot or interment allowance of $150 under the condition set forth in title 38, USC section 903(B)(1); and

WHEREAS, the purpose for enactment of the law and its amendments was to ease demand for establishing new national cemeteries since the number of persons eligible for burial in a national cemetery greatly exceeded the number of available burial plots; and

WHEREAS, to provide greater equity between those buried and those not buried in national cemeteries and to encourage development of state veterans cemeteries, an amendment to the law was passed in 1978 which provided for payment of the burial plot allowance to states or political subdivisions bearing the cost of the interment of veterans in state or local veterans cemeteries; and

WHEREAS, everything possible should be done to encourage, through grants and other means, development of state veterans cemeteries in order to provide every veteran the opportunity to be buried in a veterans cemetery; and

WHEREAS, the plot allowance of $150 has remained stationary since 1973 and requires an increase to restore its buying power; and

WHEREAS, the cost of expanding state cemeteries is increasing annually and delaying their needed expansion will result in veterans cemetery plots becoming increasingly scarce and eventually nonexistent; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, by the 91st National Convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, that legislation be sought to increase the burial plot allowance from $150 to $250 to defray the burial expense of the veterans not buried in a national cemetery; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the increase of the plot allowance be applied to all veterans currently eligible for the benefit and that we oppose the Department of Veterans Affairs' proposal that would further limit eligibility as a cost saving measure.

Adopted by the 91st National Convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, held in Baltimore, Maryland, August 17-24, 1990.

Resolution No. 623

The second problem arose when DOD notified ABMC that beginning in FY 1979 it would be necessary to reduce its military personnel support. However, all active duty commissioned support has continued to date, but this issue still remains unresolved.

After considering these facts, the VFW firmly believes ABMC has enough challenges just meeting its current requirements without taking on the responsibilities of the NCS. In fact, the VFW believes the major basic problem facing both ABMC and the NCS is a lack of funding over the past several years.

The last subject the VFW will comment on is this subcommittee's proposal to create burial eligibility to members of the Selected Reserve who have served at least 20 years.

The benefit of burial in a VA national cemetery includes the gravesite, opening and closing of the grave, and perpetual care; headstones and markers are also provided and placed to mark the grave at government expense.

The present eligibility for this benefit requires that veterans must be discharged or separated from active duty under conditions other than dishonorable who have completed the required period of active duty service. Also, U.S. Armed Forces personnel who die on active duty are eligible for burial, as well as spouse and dependent children of eligible living and deceased veterans, and of current and deceased armed forces members my also be buried in a national cemetery.

Based on our understanding of this very important, earned entitlement the VFW is more than willing to listen to the rationale that would be presented to extend a veteran entitlement to another segment of the population, and presumably the same entitlement would be extended to their spouses and dependent children. However, at the present time the VFW does not support the proposal to grant this entitlement to any new category of military personnel who have not served a required period of active duty service, other than for job qualification and/or to meet a mandatory annual training requirement.

Thank you Mr. Chairman. I will be happy to respond to any questions the committee may have. This concludes the VFW statement.

organizations, want national cemeteries within reasonable driving distance of each of the nation's major veteran population centers.

We also recommended another $10.8 million, in the minor construction protion of our independent budget. This is the minimum amount of money needed to support existing national cemetery construction projects. In the VFW's judgment this sum of almost $11 million should be considered as part of the operational needs of the NCS. We base this on the fact that no monies were actually appropriated for this function by the congress since FY 1989 and this lack of funding continues through to the FY 1991 appropriation. Our purpose in frankly stating these facts is to ask congress to fully fund this portion of the NCS simply because it is a terrible wrong to allow something as visible, as valuable, and as irreplaceable to become so shoddy.

The VFW is aware of the March 11, 1991, report sent to the House Committee on the Budget from the Committee on Veterans' Affairs regarding the administration's request for $57 million and 1200 employees to operate the NCS this coming year. We noted that the Committee on Veterans' Affairs recommended an increase of $11 million and 178 more FTEE for a total of $68 million and 1378 employees. It is a matter of record that these additional monies and FTEE were in the initial VA budget request submitted to the Office of Management and Budget(OMB). Apparently OMB deleted the money.

The closing paragraph of the committee report dealing with the NCS budget comes very close to summarizing the VFW's position when stating:

> "Although the Committee [on Veterans' Affairs] believes the National Cemetery System has been administered in as efficient a manner as possible given its resources,...in reality it would take approximately $25 million to fully fund the operation (emphasis added) of the National Cemetery System in a manner befitting the nation's commitment to our veterans."

This subcommittee also asked for comments on the possibility of transferring the operations of the NCS to the American Battle Monuments Commission, hereafter referred to as ABMC. This is an interesting and innovative suggestion.

The VFW realizes the Committee on Veterans' Affairs has jurisdiction over ABMC which, in turn, is responsible for the construction and permanent maintenance of military cemeteries and memorials. Presently ABMC maintains and administers 24 permanent American military cemetery memorials and 11 separate monuments in nine foreign cemeteries, plus three memorials in the United States. The VFW is also aware that the ABMC monitors the maintenance and state of repair of 150 private U.S. monuments and memorials in foreign countries. In summary, the VFW strongly supports their present mission and heartily concurs with this committee's summary statement of results achieved:

> "The cemeteries and memorials of the Commission are unquestionably the most beautiful and meticulously maintained cemeteries and memorials in the world."

Like most other federally funded activities ABMC also is experiencing problems. Because this agency is so labor intense about 82 percent of its obligated funds were used to defray personnel salaries and benefits, in 1990. Historically ABMC has made up funding shortfalls by using funds appropriated for maintenance, repairs, spare parts, new equipment, and other capital improvement projects.

There are two other problems unique to ABMC. One is the fluctuating dollar's exchange rate with foreign currencies, and the other is that the Department of Defense(DOD) and the Army continues to support ABMC's military personnel requirements, including the need for a general officer as Secretary.

During the first three months of FY 1991 (October, November, and December, 1990) ABMC lost about one quarter of their $1.4 million currency fluctuation account. To address this problem the VFW notes that this full committee said in the previously cited March 1991 Report To The Committee On The Budget that:

> "Should this rate of loss continue, the fund will be exhausted early in the 4th quarter. It will be necessary to reduce planned maintenance and repairs and supply and equipment purchases to offset the losses."

Resolution No. 735 - to restore VA burial allowance to survivors of all wartime veterans, whether they were in receipt of VA disability compensation pension or military retirement pay at time of death. As everyone here recalls, this entitlement was lost a decade ago when congress passed the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1981 and President Reagan signed the bill into law in August of that same year.

Resolution No. 752 - to annex a portion of land not being used by the Barksdale Air Force Base complex vicinity of Bossier City, Louisiana, as part of the NCS to serve those entitled to this benefit in the northern half of Louisiana.

To put this hearing in proper perspective I shall highlight the facts of recent hearings on this topic. Two years ago, in April 1989, we all agreed the NCS consisted of 113 cemeteries of which 65 were open for new burials and the remaining 48 were closed except for second interments. Today only 64 remain open. The entire system contained 10,100 acres. About 4,000 acres were developed for interment, and 6,000 acres remain undeveloped. There were approximately 56,200 interments in 1988, 58,300 in 1989, and 61,400 in 1990. At this hearing we were given the results of a June 1987 study of the NCS regarding projected annual veteran deaths. Figures cited were an estimated total of about 427,000 in 1987 to 611,000 in 2010. The cumulative veteran deaths during this same 23 year period of time would be approximately 19 million, or 68 percent of all presently living veterans. This same study projected that 21 existing cemeteries would close between the 13 year period of time from 1987 to the year 2000 and an additional 15 were projected to close during the next 20 years--from the year 2000 to 2020.

The following year, in March 1990, the VFW again participated in an NCS hearing. We all noted the fact that the aging veteran population requesting interment was increasing at a rate of about three percent each year. Furthermore, we all agreed the 1990 workload measures were expected to continue to increase at this same rate until the year 2010. Based on these facts the VFW recommended that the top two priorities for the NCS be:

- o to locate as much grave space as appropriate for veterans and their dependents, and
- o to start to replace their dated equipment used within this system.

To support our contentions the VFW, along with several other veterans service organizations, submitted our fourth Independent Budget for Veterans Programs for FY 1991: "The Price of Peace". We recommended the VA's FY 1991 budget request of $54.8 million for NCS be increased by $12.4 to alleviate their current equipment backlog, to pay for normal salary increases, and to buy new equipment. This would total $67.2 million. Furthermore, we recommended, in the construction portion of the budget, that $16.5 million be allocated for acquisition of land for new cemeteries, and for the maintenance and repair of existing cemeteries. Despite our best efforts to properly address these problems, the Congressional appropriation last year for NCS was $53.5 million. Unfortunately, this figure was one million dollars less than the administration had originally requested.

Today we are asked to comment on the operational needs of the NCS, particularly in view of existing fiscal restraints imposed by the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1990, P.L.101-508. Again this year the VFW, in concert with AMVETS, DAV, AND PVA, and with the strong endorsement of some 20 additional associations and organizations, has published our Independent Budget for Veterans Affairs for FY 1992. The proper title this year, appropriately enough is, "A Nation's Commitment: A Matter of Honor To Those Who Serve." The VFW holds firm for an FY 1992 NCS appropriation of $71.9 million to address the operational needs of personnel problems, the equipment replacement backlog issue, the maintenance and the many repair projects deferred these past few years. These are the same issues previously discussed regarding the VA's FY 1991 budget when we recommended a total of $67.2 million.

In addition to the $71.9 million operational money, we have recommended $6.6 million within the major construction portion of our budget to acquire land for national cemeteries in states that presently have none; i.e. Connecticut, Delaware, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Rhode Island, Utah, Vermont, Washington, and Wyoming. In addition, Maine presently has a closed national cemetery. Furthermore, the VFW recommends that VA purchase land and construct two new national cemeteries annually until the NCS has an open national cemetery in every state. Once this goal is achieved, we, and all the other participating veterans service

STATEMENT OF

BOB MANHAN, SPECIAL ASSISTANT
NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE SERVICE
VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS OF THE UNITED STATES

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND MEMORIAL AFFAIRS
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

WITH RESPECT TO

OVERSIGHT OF THE NATIONAL CEMETERY SYSTEM

WASHINGTON, D. C. APRIL 18, 1991

MR. CHAIRMAN AND MEMBERS OF THE SUBCOMMITTEE:

Thank you for inviting the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States to appear before this important body this morning. The 2.9 million members of the VFW, to include our Ladies Auxiliary, are very concerned with the issue of our National Cemetery System, hereafter referred to as the NCS.

Historically the NCS, except for Arlington National Cemetery, was transferred to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) from the Department of the Army (DA) in 1973. Today, VA's Department of Memorial Affairs administers the NCS which consists of 113 cemeteries located in 38 states and Puerto Rico. The four principle missions of the NCS are to:

—inter deceased veterans as well as deceased active duty members of the Armed Forces, their spouses, and certain dependents;

--provide headstones for burials in both national and private cemeteries;

--administer the program of grants to states for state veterans cemeteries, and;

--prepare and issue Presidential Memorial Certificates to surviving family members and others who request them.

The VFW has a long-standing priority resolution to have Congress enact the necessary legislation that would establish at least one open national cemetery in each state. At our last National Convention, held in Baltimore, Maryland, in August 1990, my organization passed eight different resolutions which impact on today's hearing. A copy of each is attached to this statement. They are in brief:

Resolution No. 623 - to increase from $150 to $250 the burial plot allowance for veterans not buried in a national cemetery;

Resolution N. 624 - to provide for an open national cemetery in every state. This is a priority legislative goal as stated above;

Resolution No. 627 - to pay all transportation costs for deceased Medal of Honor recipients from their place of death to Arlington National Cemetery or other cemetery of choice for burial;

Resolution No. 681 - to ask Congress to incorporate part of The Presidio, San Francisco, California, into the NCS if that Army base is closed as previously recommended by the Secretary of Defense.

Resolution No. 682 - to pass necessary legislation to use part of the undeveloped land at the VAMC in Los Angeles, California, as an extension to that city's NCS which has been closed for burials for the last 15 years.

Resolution No. 712 - to initiate legislation that would transfer 325 acres of Fort Sheridan, Illinois, to VA for use as part of the NCS to serve entitled veterans and eligible dependents in the northeast portion of that state.

responsibility of the federal government to provide a final resting place for all eligible veterans who have served in defense of this nation.

We encourage you to engage in aggressive oversight of the National Cemetery System and, by so doing, ensure that the veterans who have served this Nation will be given the appropriate honors which should be bestowed upon them.

The VSOs in prior Independent Budgets have been complimentary about National Cemetery Management. We remain so. The National Cemetery System does much with little. As noted in your (House Veterans Affairs' Committee) Report on the FY 1991 VA Budget which contained this illustration:

> "It should be noted that from 1983 to 1990, internment and grave site maintenance workloads have increased 35.4 percent and 19.1 percent, respectively. During the same period, the increase in staffing has been only 2.8 percent. We are all impressed with NCS's proven ability to administer this program as efficiently as possible, given its resources. The FY 1991 appropriations process, however, was not kind to the National Cemetery System."

VA top managers do not have Information Resources Management (IRM) (computer access) readily available to assess the quality of health care or the effectiveness of services provided to veterans. VA information is contained in over 150 fragmented automated systems and multiple, ad hoc manual systems.

The information in these systems are not efficiently collected nor can it be easily accessed by management. Further, information is duplicated throughout the systems, cannot be effectively integrated and shared, and often is incomplete, inaccurate, or late. As a result, Information Resources Management's weaknesses have been an impediment to efficiency hindering the National Cemetery System's ability to effectively manage programs and have contributed to service delays.

VA does not have a structured approach to systematically plan, prioritize, and implement all aspects of its near-and long-term information needs. Consequently, VA cannot effectively evaluate its own performance and fix accountability.

Individual agency components such as the National Cemetery System strive to automate and improve technology, but their very autonomy hinders the development of an integrated VA Information Resources Management. In order to minimize increases in staff and operational expenditures during this period, and to maintain current levels of service, NCS has committed to automation at all levels of business operations. Short and long range planning will require the enhancement of NCS's ability to access large volumes of historical data for use in workload analysis and the most beneficial distribution of resources.

The automation benefits delivery will permit NCS to exchange information with the Veterans Benefits Administration's (VBA) Insurance System; the Compensation, Pension, and Education (CP&E) Systems; and the Beneficiary Information Record Locator System (BIRLS) to expedite the entire death benefit process.

In its support of automation goals, NCS and the VA Central Office Automation Center are involved in a joint effort to develop an automated Burial Operations Support System (BOSS). This project will provide basic automation capabilities for the 69 National Cemeteries where a director is present, the 3 National Cemetery Area Offices (NCAO), and the Central Office (VACO). This will enable NCS to automate the paperwork and record keeping associated with each interment at the National Cemeteries.

The development approach includes the use of off-the-shelf personal computers and software, as well as existing software and facilities to minimize costs, while providing data and hardware standardization. By using automated information exchange, other VA and Federal programs will be able to initiate appropriate action or provide beneficiaries with information in a more timely manner. Currently, the interment processing function incorporates a mix of automation, manual procedures, paper forms, and voluminous document files. In automating, integrating, and standardizing this process, BOSS will be required to do the following: accommodate an increasing workload, provide timely notification of death to Departmental organizations involved in the administration of benefit programs, eliminate manual cross-referencing of information, maximize the utilization of personnel and physical resources, and capture information crucial to NCS and VA information resources management (IRM) planning activities.

However, VA recognizes that significant information weaknesses have impaired services to veterans and has begun to correct these deficiencies by streamlining its central Information Resources Management organization and developing an aggressive oversight which would include strategic planning of the IRM system. To help VA determine system needs an outside study by Federal IRM Planning Support Center, Office of Software Development and Information Technology of Falls Church, Va., formulated that the National Cemetery System interment processing workload will continue to increase over the useful life of the proposed system by an annual average of 4 percent through fy 1995 and 14 percent thereafter. This assumption is based on the best obtainable Government and private sector actuarial data.

The system must provide the storage capacity and processing capability to handle NCS's workload volumes during peak and non-peak periods throughout its life. During the life of the system, the response time must be within three to five seconds, so that system users can provide service to the public, whether by telephone or in person, without excessive delays.

The system must be designed and structured in such a way that policy changes, enhancements, or maintenance changes that affect a single entity or all cemeteries can be made quickly and efficiently. The system must be menu driven and designed for end users that do not have a technical background or an understanding of ADP terms.

The total cost of the proposed BOSS development and maintenance in FY 1990 constant dollars for the period FY 1990 through FY 1996 would be $4.4 million. Total cost avoidance during FY 1992 through FY 1996 would be $6.6 million. Net system life benefit $2.2 million.

But remaining challenges will require management's continuing commitment as well as support from Congress to ensure the success of these technological advancements in Information Resources Management.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, PVA would like to thank the Administrators of the Arlington National Cemetery and the members of the American Battle Monuments Commission for their efforts to provide excellent support services to the veterans of this Nation.

Mr. Chairman, that concludes my testimony. I will be happy to answer any question you may have.

STATEMENT OF

MICHAEL P. CLINE

MASTER SERGEANT

OHIO ARMY NATIONAL GUARD

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

ENLISTED ASSOCIATION OF THE NATIONAL GUARD

OF THE UNITED STATES

BEFORE THE

VETERAN'S AFFAIRS SUBCOMMITTEE

ON HOUSING AND MEMORIAL AFFAIRS

18 APRIL 1991

Mr. Chairman and distinguished members of the Subcommittee:

I am pleased to have been asked to testify before the Veterans Affairs Subcommittee on Housing and Memorial Affairs. I am also proud to have the opportunity to share with you the views of the Enlisted Association of the National Guard of the United States.

As you may be aware, our Association represents the Enlisted members of the Army and Air National Guard. We at EANGUS are very pleased to see the issue of burial eligibility for 20 year members of the Selected Reserve resurface. As recently as last month, our Reserve Component Forces were engaged in combat in the Middle-East. These Selected Reserve "citizen soldiers" served shoulder-to-shoulder with active duty members of our Armed Forces. We at EANGUS realize that each and every one of our Selected Reserve soldiers volunteered for a Military position knowing that they might be called to serve in a combat operation. However, we must stress that when the call for action came, our Selected Reserve Forces answered with resounding readiness and zeal. Operation Desert Storm is clear evidence that the Total Force strength shown in the Persian Gulf would not have been possible without our Selective Reserve soldiers.

I would like to focus on the inequity between Active Duty time served in order to be eligible for burial benefits and the amount of time a Reservist or Guardmember spends on active duty over a twenty year period of service, without becoming eligible for the same benefit.

Any honorably discharged active duty member of the Armed Forces who serves a minimum of 181 days is eligible for burial benefits. Active duty personnel begin to accrue time towards receiving benefits the moment they begin basic training. Active duty soldiers are allowed to count individual training time that was spent attending schools during their enlistment. Active duty Forces also receive credit for time served while attending schools that are required by their respective Force to properly train them in their military specialty.

The average Enlisted member of the National Guard/Reserve spends approximately 50 days a year on active duty. (Officers spend approximately 80 days per year). An additional 5-6 months was spent on active duty to complete initial and advanced phases of basic training. Over a twenty year period,

Guardmembers/Reservists are required to attend specialty schools to enhance individual training, just like the active duty soldier. Such schools average another 60 days of training over a twenty year period.

All of this training and duty adds up to an average of 1240 days or roughly 3 1/4 years that a Guardmember or Reservist will spend on active duty during an enlistment of twenty years or more.

We feel that those 3 years plus of service should be recognized. If you begin to add up all of the time the average Guardmember/ Reservist spends on active duty over a twenty year period, the numbers outweigh the amount of time an Active duty soldier will put in during a standard 3-year enlistment.

The major injustice of the whole system is that the Selected Reserve Soldiers do not receive accrued time for their active duty service. Their duty only counts towards retirement pay for service over and above twenty years. If a Reserve Component Soldier is considered eligible for retirement pay at that time, he should also be eligible for proper interment in a National Cemetery.

I am sure some of you are wondering about the facts and figures surrounding my support for this issue. According to figures received from the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs, as of 30 September, 1990, there were approximately 980,000 total Selected Reserve Forces serving their country.

94% of these Soldiers are already eligible for burial benefits due to prior service or for other reasons. That leaves us with only 6% of all of the Selected Reserve who could possibly benefit from a change in the law as it now stands. Testimony given previously before this same Subcommittee by a representative of the American Cemetery Association stated that, "according to VA figures, less than 15 percent of veterans eligible for burial in a National cemetery choose National Cemetery System interment at the time of death." Further estimations by the 6th QRMC reported that the increase in the estimated number of burials for eligible members of the Selected Reserve would be at a rate of approximately 365 per year or 0.5 percent of the current amount of burials. The Veterans Administration has estimated that to implement the QRMC recommendation, it would only have to increase its budget by approximately $123,000 annually. Therefore, we feel that giving the 20 year Reserve

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Component Soldier a proper Military burial is not an unreasonable demand.

At the present time, an additional 220,000 members of the National Guard and Reserve have become eligible for burial benefits due to their participation in Operation Desert Storm. The time for expansion of the existing system has come. We must make accommodations great enough to support the selfless 20 year Veteran of the Selected Reserve and the brave troops of Desert Storm.

To date, there are 64 cemeteries in operation that accommodate burial of Veterans, with only one on line to open sometime in FY '92. Over the next 30 years, the NCS will lose approximately 30 of these existing cemeteries. By the year 2010, it is estimated that 12 million veterans will be eligible for interment in National Cemeteries. These alarming figures show that the NCS must keep up with the demand for burial space.

Given the fact that any increased strain on the National Cemetery System could result in the deterioration of its current position, we would like to propose some possible alternatives for starting new cemeteries to handle any such increase.

1) Use Military installations that are to be closed to establish new cemeteries. There would be minimal cost involved in transferring the land to the Department of Veterans Affairs. In many cases, cemeteries are already in place. Since the land on these bases is generally wide open, very little construction would have to take place to establish new areas suitable for burial. One possible area already established on many of these posts is the golf facility. These areas are already maintained and are normally set in peaceful surroundings with easy access via previously constructed roadways.
Start-up and maintenance would be minimal because things like irrigation systems and ground maintenance equipment are already in place. Such land should soon become readily available due to the down-sizing of our conventional Military forces.

2) Encourage States to co-sponsor and establish their own Military cemeteries under the auspices of the DVA. We feel that every State should have a National Cemetery. The families and loved ones of those requesting Military interment need to be assured they will have reasonable access to cemeteries. Accessible State Cemeteries would better serve any individual requesting

Military interment. A prime example of the unfairness of the Regional system is that a person living in the Southwest might have to travel up to 800 miles to visit the nearest National Cemetery. We find these situations unacceptable and are asking for a change.

We feel that if one of these options is implemented, our National Guard/Reserve Soldiers and Airmen, would be honored in a way they so fully deserve. Our suggestions could also ease the pressure the NCS might be facing in the future. Thank you for this opportunity to testify before your Subcommittee. I will be happy to answer any questions at this time.

STATEMENT BY

LIEUTENANT GENERAL LA VERN E. WEBER (RET.)

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

of the

NATIONAL GUARD ASSOCIATION OF THE UNITED STATES

to the

Subcommittee on Housing and Memorial Affairs

of the

House Committee on Veterans Affairs

19 April 1991

INTRODUCTION

It is a pleasure to appear before this committee on behalf of the more than 56,000 men and women of the National Guard Association of the United States. The retired and active members of the National Guard are individuals, who, by their service to this country, have demonstrated their commitment and patriotism. Operations DESERT SHIELD and DESERT STORM are indisputable proof of that commitment and capability.

The National Guard Association requests this committee to recognize the service of career members of the National Guard by allowing them the privilege of burial in national cemeteries and by providing them a burial flag.

ACTIVE DUTY REQUIREMENT

Section 3103A, Title 38, U.S.C., establishes an overall active duty service criteria for entitlement or eligibility to any or all veterans benefit programs. In addition, many of the programs have a specific criteria for eligibility.

Until 1981, eligibility for many veterans benefits required 180 consecutive days of active duty. At that point, the requirement was changed to 24 consecutive months of active duty for all benefit programs, except for individuals who served in a conflict or war. Under either criteria with the exception of prior service personnel or Active/Guard and Reserve (AGR) personnel, only a small percentage of National Guard and Reserve members would have completed that amount of consecutive active duty days/months within a 20 year career.

NATIONAL GUARD SERVICE

Until the development of the Total Force Policy in the early 1970s, there were few requirements or opportunities for extended periods of active duty for National Guard members. Training and school requirements have greatly increased under the Total Force Policy. National Guard personnel are required to train to the same standards as their active service counterparts. Members of the Selected Reserve have to balance these demands with their primary civilian career and other constraints on their availability for lengthy periods of active duty.

Under the Total Force Policy, the National Guard and Reserve no longer perform just a reinforcing role. Last year, when we appeared before this Committee, we provided statistics on the percentages of total Army and Air Force missions assigned to the modern Army and Air National Guard. This year those abstract facts have become tangible performance through Operation DESERT SHIELD/DESERT STORM. The depth of integration of the National Guard in the wartime function of the military has been clearly demonstrated.

During the course of a career of 20 years or more in the National Guard, an individual has a continuous requirement to be available for almost immediate mobilization, not just for major conflicts but for any level of contingency. National Guard personnel were involved in Operation JUST CAUSE in Panama and the assault on Libya, as well as the recent Operation DESERT SHIELD.

EXISTING POLICY

We recognize there are legitimate reasons to differentiate between active duty service and Selected Reserve service for eligibility for many of the benefits administered by the Department of Veterans' Affairs. That same differentiation exists in programs administered by the Department of Defense.

But, we question two aspects of the current policy. First, the exclusion of short periods of active duty and all periods of active duty for training regardless of the purpose. Such a policy ignores the many day-to-day operational missions performed for the Services by members of the National Guard and Reserve. While these missions clearly provide training and experience, they also fulfill an operational need of the Services and are often identical to the missions being performed by active duty personnel. Second, the failure of the system to recognize that a 20 year or longer career provides service to this nation that is, at the very least, equal to 24 months of active duty service.

BURIAL IN NATIONAL CEMETERIES

The current statutes and policy of the Department of Veterans' Affairs preclude a significant portion of National Guard and Reserve members from being buried in national cemeteries. The problem is created by the active duty requirements in Section 3103A of Title 38, U.S.C., defining overall eligibility for or entitlement to veterans benefits.

Chapter 23, Title 38, U.S.C, which governs burial does not have a specific active duty requirement.

The 6th Quadrennial Review of Military Compensation (6th QRMC) examined this issue in 1987 and in its final report recommended that National Guard and Reserve members, who have completed a 20 year career and are eligible for retirement, should be authorized burial in national cemeteries. The 6th QRMC report cited mobilization vulnerability and preparedness as the justification for its recommendation. The cost estimates provided in the 6th QRMC report indicate an estimated increase of 365 burials per year, with an annual budget increase of approximately $123,000. Obviously, cost is not a factor.

As a result of service in support of Operations DESERT SHIELD and DESERT STORM, the Department of Veterans' Affairs has incurred an obligation to over 200,000 members of the National Guard and Reserve who now meet the definition of veteran. They will be eligible for burial in national cemeteries. All members of the National Guard were prepared to serve their country and it is by happenstance that their unit was or was not called.

BURIAL FLAG

A peripheral issue, presentation of a burial flag, also revolves around Section 3103A, Title 38, U.S.C.. A member of the National Guard who has served honorably and faithfully and who dies under honorable circumstances may be awarded a burial flag up until the time he or she reaches age 60 and becomes eligible for or begins receiving retired pay. Eligibility prior to age 60 is governed by Department of Defense policies. The change in eligibility is created by the transfer of responsibility for providing the burial flag from the Department of Defense to the Department of Veterans' Affairs. Upon reaching age 60, an individual suddenly becomes ineligible for a burial flag unless he or she meets the definition of a veteran.

Burial flags cost approximately $21 per flag. This is an extremely small price to pay to recognize a career of service to this country.

SUMMARY

The Department of Veterans' Affairs, in correspondence with this Association last year, stated that the cemetery system could not support the existing eligible population. They cited the reduced availability of burial spaces for all veterans based on limited cemetery properties and the growing demand generated by the large group of aging World War II, Korean War and Vietnam War veterans. They concluded by stating that granting this change in law would not provide a tangible benefit to the National Guard community.

The situation created by Operations DESERT SHIELD and DESERT STORM will require revised estimates and long term planning for the national cemetery system. We respectfully submit that one of the considerations in expansion planning should be inclusion of 20 year career National Guard and Reserve members.

Burial space in cemeteries operated by the Department of Veterans' Affairs may continue to be limited in the near term. However, the current statute and policy do not just restrict national cemeteries. They apply to state cemeteries which are built or supported partially through federal funding. It is clear the existing restrictions have an effect beyond the obvious scope.

The National Guard Association of the United States recognizes and commends the Congress for its continuing support and treatment of the members of the National Guard commensurate with their integral role in the Total Force. We are especially appreciative of the Veterans' Affairs Committee role in responding rapidly to the needs surfaced by DESERT SHIELD and DESERT STORM to amend the Soldiers' and Sailors' Civil Relief Act and to clarify veterans' reemployment rights. Historically the Committee has provided significant benefits through the Montgomery GI Bill and health professionals education assistance programs.

We strongly recommend that this committee support changes to statute and regulation that would extend eligibility to National Guard members to be buried in national cemeteries and that would provide a burial flag to members who are eligible to receive a military retirement. These changes would have no affect on the

Department of Defense budget and would require only minimal increases to the budget of the Department of Veterans' Affairs. On the other hand, extension of these benefits would send a powerful message of recognition and appreciation to the men and women of the National Guard and their families for life long dedication and sacrifice on behalf of the defense of this nation.

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Testimony of

James E. Watkins, Jr.

American Cemetery Association

Before the

Subcommittee on Housing and Memorial Affairs

Committee on Veterans' Affairs

U.S. House of Representatives

With Respect to

The National Cemetery System and Related Burial Benefits

April 18, 1991

Chairman Staggers and Members of the Subcommittee:

My name is James E. Watkins, Jr., and I am here today on behalf of the American Cemetery Association. I am a past president of the American Cemetery Association (ACA) and a past president of the Indiana State Cemetery Association. Besides being a second-generation cemeterian, I served with the Strategic Air Command as navigator and separated with the rank of Captain. I am also a member of the American Legion.

We appreciate this opportunity to testify this morning and request the complete text of our written testimony be made part of the record of today's hearing. I will be glad to answer any questions from you and the Subcommittee members at the conclusion of my testimony.

The American Cemetery Association is a national trade association which represents over 2,000 members including municipal, religious and private cemeteries. The ACA respectfully submits its views on the long-term planning of the National Cemetery System, including related burial benefits.

Restoration of the Plot and Marker Allowances

The ACA is pleased to join with the various veterans' organizations in advocating the restoration of the VA plot allowance and the marker reimbursement allowance. We estimate that approximately 70 percent of the veterans formerly entitled to receive the plot allowance are now ineligible due to Congress's action late last year. The elimination of the marker allowance has disqualified all veterans entitled to receive this benefit. Two bills referred to this Subcommittee seek to restore these and the related burial allowance. H.R.103 would restore the eligibility requirements for the VA basic burial allowance to pre-1981 standards and also seeks to increase this benefit from $300 to $400. A second bill, H.R.1622, would restore the marker allowance. The ACA urges this Subcommittee to report both bills favorably to the full Committee.

While we understand the cutbacks in the plot and burial allowances were necessitated by the need to reduce the federal deficit, the ACA nevertheless believes these savings are strictly short-term in nature. The so-called short-term savings will ultimately create much larger deficits in future years by forcing significant numbers of veterans and their families to use the facilities of the National Cemetery System (NCS) as an alternative to these discontinued benefits.

VA statistics indicate that 85 percent of all burial benefits were provided through the plot allowance; the remaining 15 percent of the veterans or their families chose interment in national cemeteries. The severe curtailment in plot allowance eligibility requirements and the elimination of the marker allowance could drastically shift these percentages creating unprecedented demands on the NCS.

The fiscal impact of these curtailments in future years will mean that the VA must discharge its burial obligations through the most costly means possible: interment in national cemeteries. Not only will total NCS interment expenses increase, but the overall maintenance needs of the NCS will be significantly underfunded.

Last year, the ACA was pleased to support this Committee's efforts to appropriate an additional $15 million for emergency maintenance and equipment needs of the NCS. This year, the Committee is seeking an additional $11 million over the proposed fiscal year 1992 budget.

The private sector is keenly aware of the escalating cost of cemetery maintenance, a factor which has been largely ignored in NCS future planning. Curtailment of the plot allowance and the elimination of the marker allowance could not be more ill-timed since both benefits have a direct relationship to accelerated NCS burial caseloads in future years.

When the overwhelming majority of veterans have indicated their preference for the plot and marker allowances, building additional national cemeteries as the primary solution to projected burial caseloads is both costly and inefficient. Given the popularity of the plot and marker allowances, the existing resources of literally thousands of private, religious, and municipal cemeteries in the United States, and the long-term savings

derived from these allowances, additional national cemeteries should be constructed as a last resort, not as a first resort.

1991 VA Study on the National Cemetery System

Public Law 99-576 requires the VA to submit a report to Congress in 1991 concerning the future planning of the NCS. In compiling this report, the ACA urges the VA to study two important areas which were ignored in its earlier 1987 report. The first area concerns the correlation between eligibility requirements for various burial benefits and their effect on the NCS burial caseload. Specifically, the VA should examine the extent to which the NCS burial caseload will increase as alternate benefits, such as the plot allowance, are curtailed or eliminated, and the resulting budgetary effect on the NCS.

A historical basis for such a correlation already exists. As previously noted, the eligibility requirements for the basic burial allowance of $300 were substantially curtailed in 1981. Predictably, the number of veterans receiving this benefit declined sharply in subsequent years. In 1989, the burial allowance caseload was less than one-third of its 1981 level. Interments in the NCS during this time increased by nearly 50 percent from 1981 to 1990. The aging of the World War II-era veterans is a factor, but it does not satisfactorily explain away the apparent link between the restriction of one burial benefit and an upsurge in another.

For example, if only 10 percent of the veterans estimated to receive the $150 plot allowance in 1990 applied instead for NCS interment, the NCS burial caseload for 1990 would have increased by over 50 percent. The ACA submits that it is economically unfeasible for the NCS to provide an interment, with or without related maintenance services, for a modest $150.00.

The second area which ACA urges the VA to review in its forthcoming report concerns the projected levels of NCS maintenance expenses over the next twenty years. The experiences of the last twelve months regarding emergency NCS maintenance appropriations have hopefully educated members of Congress to the uniqueness of

cemeteries. Unlike other types of operations, cemeteries cannot be arbitrarily consolidated or phased out when nearly two million gravesites must be maintained perpetually. Regardless of the restoration of the plot and marker allowances, projected maintenance expenses should be recognized in any future planning of the NCS. These two areas of concern are central to a serious study of NCS operations, and the Committee should consider the VA report incomplete without thorough examination of them.

In conclusion, the ACA believes that the current policy of curtailing alternate burial benefits is unfair to veterans and places a disproportionate burden on the National Cemetery System without proper fiscal planning. We urge the Subcommittee to act favorably on legislation restoring the plot allowance and marker allowance. Thank you.

BEFORE THE
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND MEMORIAL AFFAIRS
APRIL 18, 1991

The American battle Monuments Commission (ABMC) welcomes the opportunity to provide information on its operations, the status of pending memorial construction under its jurisdiction and the possibility of transferring the operations of the National Cemetery System to the Commission.

The principal functions of the Commission are to commemorate the achievements and sacrifices of United States Armed Forces where they have served since April 6, 1917 through the erection and maintenance of suitable memorial shrines; to design, construct, administer and maintain permanent American military burial grounds in foreign countries; to control the design and construction on foreign soil of U.S. military monuments and markers by other U.S. citizens and organizations both public and private; and to encourage U.S. governmental agencies and private individuals and organizations to maintain adequately the monument and markers which they have erected on foreign soil.

Prior to 1923, no federal agency was responsible for commemorating the sacrifices and achievements of U.S. Armed Forces. After the Allied victory in World War I, many American troop units erected monuments and markers to themselves where they had served in Europe. These monuments and markers came in assorted sizes, shapes and descriptions. Too often they bore little relationship to the achievements of the units, were poorly designed and constructed, were erected on land not owned by the units and were without provision for future maintenance. A study of the problem was made by the War Department which concluded that a federal agency should be responsible for honoring U.S. Armed Forces where they had served and for controlling the construction of U.S. military monuments and markers on foreign soil by U.S. citizens and organizations both public and private. As a result of the study, legislation was enacted by the U.S. Congress in 1923 creating the American Battle Monuments Commission to perform these functions.

In the performance of its present functions, ABMC administers, operates and maintains 24 permanent American military burial grounds and 15 separate monuments in 14 foreign countries and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands and 4 memorials on United States soil. These cemeteries, memorials and monuments are among the most beautiful and meticulously maintained shrines of their nature in the world. Few others combine such fitness of design, beauty of landscaping and memorial features and immaculate care. Interred in these burial grounds are 124,912 U.S. War Dead -- 30,921 of World War I, 93,241 of World War II and 750 of the Mexican War. In addition, 6,547 American veterans and others are interred in the Mexico City and Corozal Cemeteries. The World War Cemeteries and the Mexico City Cemetery are closed to burials except for the remains of War Dead still found from time to time in the World War I and II battle areas. In addition to burials, the World War I and II Cemeteries together with 3 memorials on U.S. soil commemorate

individually by name on Tablets of the Missing, the 94,100 U.S. servicemen and women who were Missing in Action or lost or buried at sea in their general region during the World Wars and the Korean and Vietnam Wars.

The care of these shrines to our War Dead requires a formidable annual program of maintenance and repair of facilities, vehicles and equipment; grounds maintenance and horticultural care. This care includes upkeep of 131,000 graves and headstones; 53 memorial structures; 41 quarters, utilities and maintenance facilities; 67 miles of roads and paths; 3,000,000 square feet of flowering shrubs and hedges; and 11,000 ornamental trees. The estimated replacement cost collectively is $292,390,000. All of the plantings, to include the fine lawns and to some extent the meadows, must be cut and/or shaped and fed and treated with insecticides and fungicides at regular intervals during the growing season. The plantings also must be replaced when their useful lives are exhausted or they receive major storm damage. Much of this maintenance and care must be performed by casual labor because the permanent cemetery staffs are not large enough to provide it on a daily basis.

In the spring of 1985, the U.S. Government embarked on a long term program to lower the value of the U.S. dollar on foreign markets in order to make U.S. goods and services more competitive. As a result, the exchange rate for the dollar has decreased considerably in the countries where our installations are located. In order to insulate the Commission's annual appropriation against major changes in the U.S. dollar's value, legislation was enacted in 1988 establishing an ABMC Currency Fluctuation Account with the U.S. Treasury. When the exchange rates of the dollar are higher than the budgeted rates, monies saved are deposited in the account for future use in overcoming losses. When the exchange rates of the dollar are lower than the budgeted rates, funds are taken from the account to offset the losses. At the beginning of the current fiscal year, ABMC's currency fluctuation account contained $1,370,000. Losses reported to date this fiscal year have been $713,000. The appropriation request for fiscal 1992 contains $2,000,000 for future currency exchange losses.

ABMC's Appropriation for the current year is $15,900,000. The expenses of the Commission's fall into two basic categories: commemoration of the Armed Forces where they have served and care and maintenance of the military burial grounds, memorials and monuments around the world for which it is responsible. ABMC's appropriation request to the Congress for next year, fiscal 1992, is $18,440,000 of which $2,000,000 would be deposited in the Currency Fluctuation Account with the U.S. Treasury.

The following information and services are provided without cost to friends and relatives of those interred in or commemorated at ABMC's cemeteries and memorials: name, location and general information about the cemetery, monument or memorial in which they are interested; plot, row and grave number(s) if applicable; best route and modes of travel in-country to the cemetery or monument; general information about accommodations available in the vicinity of the cemetery or monument; letters authorizing fee-free passports for members of the immediate family traveling overseas specifically to visit an ABMC grave or memorial

site; a black and white photograph of the headstone or section of the Tablets of the Missing where the individual's name is engraved mounted on a large color lithograph of the cemetery or memorial; arrangement for floral decoration of the gravesite or section of the Tablets of the Missing where the name of the individual appears utilizing funds provided by the donor and provision of a color Polaroid photograph to the donor of the decoration in place, weather permitting.

Presently ABMC is engaged in two projects establishing memorials: the Korean War Veterans Memorial here in the Nation's Capital and the Guadalcanal American Memorial in the Solomon Islands. Since Public Law 99-572 was enacted in 1986 authorizing this Commission to establish a Korean War Veterans Memorial here, the following has been accomplished: approval of the Congress has been sought and received authorizing erection of the memorial on the National Mall; a superb site for it has been approved called "Ash Woods", which is adjacent to the Lincoln Memorial and across the reflecting pool from the Vietnam Memorial; a National Design Competition has been conducted; a contract has been awarded to the Architect/Engineer firm of Cooper-Lecky to be the Architect of Record and responsible for converting the simple drawings of the winning submission in the competition into detailed drawings and specifications acceptable to all approving authorities; a contract has been awarded to the eminent sculptor, Mr. Frank Gaylord, to sculpt the 38 seven-foot figures; legislation has been enacted authorizing the minting of 1,000,000 silver dollar coins commemorating the 38th anniversary of the ending of the Korean War, $7.00 from the sale of each to go toward establishment of the memorial -- they are scheduled to go on sale May 6, 1991; amendments to the winning design have been accepted by the Commission of Fine Arts and the National Capital Planning Commission which generally should overcome their basic reservations concerning the design; and approximately $9.135 million has been received to date in private contributions, interest and appropriations. Because of the difficulty encountered in overcoming the many initial reservations of the approving authorities with modifications acceptable to all of them, it now appears fairly certain that the requisite approvals of the detailed drawings and specifications cannot be obtained prior to authority for erecting the memorial expiring on October 28 of this year. The expiration date is established by the Commemorative Works Act which provides that authority to establish a commemorative work in the Nation's Capital shall expire at the end of the 5 year period commencing on the date of enactment of such authority, unless a building permit has been issued by the Secretary of the Interior or the Administrator of General Services, as appropriate. In order for us to obtain a building permit, the following conditions must be met:

A. The site be approved by all agencies with approval authority;
B. Detailed drawings and specifications be approved by these agencies and the construction contract approved by the Secretary of the Interior;
C. All funds for construction be on deposit with the U.S. Treasury; and,
D. As the memorial is being erected with funds obtained primarily from private contributions, a sum equal to 10% of the construction costs also must be on deposit with the U.S. Treasury and available for transfer to the Secretary of Interior for future maintenance of the memorial.

Legislation (H.R. 1744) has been introduced in the House By Messrs. Montgomery, Stump, Solomon and Stearns extending the deadline for obtaining a building permit for the memorial until October 28, 1993. Similar legislation has been introduced in the Senate by Senators Glenn and Rudman. Such an extension should provide us with sufficient time to resolve any future reservations affecting the design and ensure that sufficient funds are available to erect the memorial.

The Guadalcanal American Memorial honoring the achievements of our ground forces during the Guadalcanal Campaign and those Americans who lost their lives during that campaign was authorized and funded by Public Law 100-71. During preliminary planning for the memorial, ABMC found that the Guadalcanal-Solomon Island War Memorial Foundation also was planning to establish a memorial on Guadalcanal and arranged to combine our respective resources. The memorial will consist of a 24 foot stele four foot square and four directional walls pointing towards the major battle sites. ABMC will design and construct the stele, which will be the focal point of the memorial, and will assist the Foundation with the design of the directional walls and the inscriptions thereon. The Foundation will fund the walls and the accompanying plaza. In a formal agreement with the Commissioner of Lands for the Guadalcanal government, ABMC has obtained free use in perpetuity of a site for the memorial on a hill overlooking the city of Honiara. Design of the stele and directional walls is complete and the inscriptions have been prepared. The stone will be quarried, cut to size and inscribed in Australia and shipped by sea to Guadalcanal. It is scheduled for completion in fiscal 1992.

With respect to transfer of the National Cemetery System to the American Battle Monuments Commission, the Veterans Administration appears to be well-versed in its operation. Similarly, the American Battle Monuments Commission is well-versed in the operation of the specially designed cemetery memorials on foreign soil established specifically for the Honored Dead of prior wars. There does not appear to be any advantage in altering current responsibilities, as neither significant cost savings nor improved services would be anticipated from consolidation.

This completes the statement of this Commission.

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NATIONAL CONCRETE BURIAL VAULT ASSOCIATION

POSITION REGARDING

THE NATIONAL CEMETERY SYSTEM

Submitted to:

Subcommittee on Housing and Memorial Affairs

House Committee on Veterans' Affairs

April 18, 1991

On behalf of the National Concrete Burial Vault Association ("NCBVA"), I want to thank you for the opportunity to submit this statement for the record in connection with the Subcommittee's hearing relating to the National Cemetery System. Specifically, NCBVA would like to focus its comments on one program within the National Cemetery System -- the grave liner program. Our country's National Cemetery System is a source of pride, sacrifice, tradition and profound national awareness. Programs within the jurisdiction of this Subcommittee are critical to preserving and perpetuating the quintessential concept of memorializing the lives and deeds of Americans who have died in the service of our nation.

Since 1968, the NCBVA has worked with the Subcommittee to develop and implement a grave liner program. In 1984, our Association submitted to the Subcommittee a study entitled "The Economic and Aesthetic Impact of Using Outer Burial Receptacles in National Cemeteries", which detailed the dynamics of earth internment and its subsequent effects upon the physical and fiscal condition of the National Cemetery System.

NCBVA continues to support the fundamental position of requiring outer-burial receptacles for interments within the National Cemetery System which, corresponds with over 90% of the nation's public, private and denominational cemeteries, for the following reasons:

A. Fiscal.

B. Ongoing maintenance.

C. Perpetuity of cemetery aesthetics.

D. Safety.

E. Dignity (disinterments/relocations under public law 99-576).

F. Health and Environmental considerations (which applies to lined/sealed burial vaults).

As members of the Subcommittee are aware, with the enactment of Section 504 of Public Law 101-237 (103 STAT. 2094), effective January 1, 1990, the government must provide "a grave liner for each new grave in an open cemetery within the National Cemetery System in which remains are interred in a casket." As a matter of fundamental fairness, NCBVA feels that the grave liner (or other

outer burial receptacle) benefit should be extended to all veterans and eligible dependents, whether or not they are buried within the National Cemetery System.

We commend the members of this Subcommittee for their efforts on behalf of veterans and their families. In light of the facts, however, that the vast majority of cemeteries outside of the National Cemetery System now require outer burial receptacles, and because 400,000 of the approximate 454,000 veterans dying annually are not buried in National Cemeteries, we respectfully request that you consider integrating an outer-burial receptacle amount into the veterans death benefit package and apply this allowance to all veterans nationwide.

While we support the requirement for an outer burial receptacle, NCBVA opposes the current grave liner program based on the following:

(i) As discussed above, government provided grave liners for those interred within the National Cemetery System distorts and promotes an unfairness in the veterans death benefits system because, of the 450,000 veterans dying annually, only 12% (54,000) (20% dependents and 17% cremation), are buried in National Cemeteries. Those fortunate enough to live and die within the purview of a National Cemetery receive the grave space; opening and closing of the grave; perpetual care of the grave; cemetery marker and, effective January 1, 1990, a grave liner. The remaining 88% of veterans who are buried in public, private or denominational cemeteries, where outer burial receptacles are required, the next-of-kin receives only a grave marker and are responsible for all additional cemetery expenses, including a burial vault or grave liner.

(ii) If the government, as a result of budget concerns, is not able to offer the grave liner benefit to the vast majority of veterans and eligible dependents who are not buried within the National Cemetery System, then the capital and administrative costs associated with the current grave liner program--approximately $3,182,371.17, or $119 per grave liner for FY 90--for all active National Cemeteries are inconsistent with federal government fiscal "belt tightening" and "pay as you go" budget restrictions. NCBVA finds it particularly ironic that while the government has the resources to provide grave liners at National Cemeteries, it does not have the funds necessary to open a new National Cemetery such as San Joaquin, CA, or to properly maintain existing National Cemeteries, most dramatically illustrated by Riverside National Cemetery.

(iii) We believe that the procurement of outer burial receptacles (to include burial vaults and grave liners) is the responsibility of the next-of-kin.

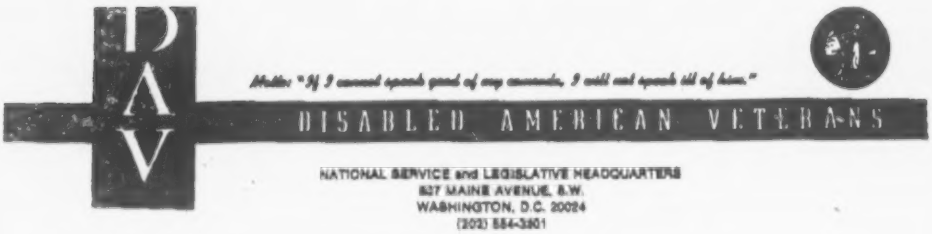
NCBVA would also like to briefly comment on a proposal relating to the transfer of responsibility for the National Cemetery System from Veterans' Affairs ("VA") to the American Battle Monuments Commission ("ABMC"). NCBVA opposes this proposal. We believe that the skill, experience, and expertise in administering the many programs associated with the National Cemetery System rightfully belongs with the VA. ABMC's focus is directed at maintaining memorials and closed cemeteries abroad, not in administering and dealing with the complexities of an active National Cemetery System.

Again, on behalf of NCBVA, I thank you for affording us this opportunity to submit our statement to the Subcommittee.

Respectfully submitted,

Jerry J. Brown, Chairman
NCBVA/National Cemetery
Relations Committee

WRITTEN COMMITTEE QUESTIONS AND THEIR RESPONSE



NATIONAL SERVICE and LEGISLATIVE HEADQUARTERS
807 MAINE AVENUE, S.W.
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(202) 554-3501

April 23, 1991

Honorable Harley O. Staggers, Jr.
Chairman
Subcommittee on Housing and Memorial Affairs
Committee on Veterans Affairs
U.S. House of Representatives
335 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-6335

Dear Mr. Chairman:

During the course of your Subcommittee's hearing of April 18, 1991 on the National Cemetery System, Representative Cliff Stearns asked the panel of witnesses to give our written comments on H.R. 103, a bill that has been introduced by Mr. Gilman.

It is our understanding that H.R. 103 would accomplish three tasks. First it would increase the allowance for a burial plot from $150 to $300. Second, it would restore eligibility for the burial allowance to those wartime veterans -- or any veterans discharged from active duty as a result of a disability incurred or aggravated in service -- who are not in receipt of pension or compensation, or would receive compensation except for receipt of service retired pay. Third, increase the burial allowance from $300 to $400.

This eligibility criteria essentially restores the status quo that existed prior to Public Law 97-35. We are in full support of restoring that eligibility as well as the increased benefit amounts.

The title of this bill, H.R. 103, is the Veterans' Burial Benefits Act of 1991. We would be in favor of an amendment to this bill or additional legislation that would restore the two cuts in burial benefits made under the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1990 (OBRA), Public Law 101-508.

Under OBRA, Title VIII, Subtitle E, Sections 8041 and 8042, two very important entitlements were eliminated. The headstone or grave marker allowance of $87 was eliminated as a benefit for veterans buried in other than a National Cemetery. Additionally, the $150 burial plot allowance was essentially eliminated for any wartime veteran not entitled to receive compensation or pension as a result of that service.

The DAV fully supports restoration of those benefits.

Thank you for giving us the opportunity of providing these remarks in response to the question asked by Mr. Stearns during the course of your Subcommittee hearing.

Sincerely,

COPY

BRUCE W. BURGESS
Associate National
Legislative Director

BWB:py
cc: Representative Gilman
Representative Stearns

The American Legion
For God and Country

★ WASHINGTON OFFICE ★ 1608 "K" STREET, N.W. ★ WASHINGTON, D.C. 20006-2847 ★
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April 29, 1991

Honorable G.V. (Sonny) Montgomery, Chairman
Committee on Veterans Affairs
United States House of Representatives
335 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman Montgomery:

The American Legion is glad to provide our comments on H.R. 103, as a follow-up to the Subcommittee on Housing and Memorial Affairs hearing of April 18, 1991.

The post-hearing question submitted to The American Legion by the Honorable Cliff Stearns is restated in its entirety, followed by our views.

1) Please comment on H.R. 103. Does the Legion support this bill? Are there specific provisions of the bill which are of particular interest or concern?

Mr. Chairman, The American Legion views the enactment of H.R. 103 as important to restoring and increasing veterans' burial and plot allowances. We support legislation to restore the pre-1981 burial allowance eligibility criteria and increase the burial benefit to $400, and restore and increase the plot allowance from $150 to $300. Additionally, we would support the restoration of eligibility for a Government furnished headstone or marker allowance to the pre-1990 Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act criteria. These views were affirmed by delegates to the 1990 American Legion National Convention, by approving Resolutions No. 488 and No. 515.

Resolution No. 488 opposes any legislative or administrative proposal that would amend the eligibility criteria for the plot allownace consistent with the requirements for the burial allowance. Resolution No. 515 places The American Legion in a position to sponsor and support legislation to restore the burial allowance as a benefit to be provided for the burial of all honorably discharged war veterans, and provides further that this burial allowance not be in an amount less than $400.

Mr. Chairman, The American Legion does not support the restrictions on eligibility for the burial and plot allowances nor the elimination of the Government furnished headstone allowance, as directed by the 1990 Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act. These actions are contrary to longstanding principles held by The American Legion, which call for equal benefits for equal service. The elimination of certain burial benefits for the majority of war veterans is a serious matter, deserving of attention and reinstatement by Congress.

Mr. Chairman, The American Legion strongly endorses H.R. 103. In addition to the provisions contained in this measure, we also urge Congress to restore the headstone allowance, which was paid to all eligible veterans in lieu of a Government provided headstone.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for providing us this opportunity to comment on H.R. 103.

Sincerely,

FRANK C. BUXTON
Deputy Director
National Veterans Affairs
and Rehabilitation
Commission

MAY 16 1991

PARALYZED VETERANS
OF AMERICA
Chartered by the Congress
of the United States

May 13, 1991

The Honorable G.V. (Sonny) Montgomery, Chairman
House Committee on Veterans' Affairs
335 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

As you will recall from our testimony before the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, Subcommittee on Housing and Memorial Affairs hearing on April 18, 1991, PVA requested additional time to review H.R. 103, regarding the extending of eligibility for burial allowance to certain additional veterans and to increase the burial plot allowance for veterans from $150 to $300.

PVA's response is attached as requested in your letter of April 24, 1991.

Sincerely,

Richard B. Fuller
National Legislative Director

Atch
PVA's response

801 Eighteenth Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20006 (202) USA-1300 Fax (202) 785-4452

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY HONORABLE CLIFF STEARNS
TO THE PARALYZED VETERANS OF AMERICA
AT THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON HOUSING & MEMORIAL AFFAIRS
APRIL 18, 1991

1) Please comment on H.R. 103. Does the PVA support this bill? Are there specific provisions of the bill which are of particular interest or concern?

After a complete review of the bill, PVA officially endorses H.R. 103 in its entirety. We do not have any specific concerns relating to this proposed legislation.

3GI-SLATE Report for the 102nd Congress Thu, April 18, 1991 1:09pm (EDT)

ILL TEXT Report for H.R.103
As introduced in the House, January 3, 1991

I

102d CONGRESS
1st Session

H. R. 103

To amend title 38, United States Code, to extend eligibility for burial allowance to certain additional veterans and to increase the burial plot allowance for veterans from $150 to $300.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
January 3, 1991

Mr. Gilman introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs

---

A BILL

To amend title 38, United States Code, to extend eligibility for burial allowance to certain additional veterans and to increase the burial plot allowance for veterans from $150 to $300.

==========

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.
This Act may be cited as the "Veterans' Burial Benefits Act of 1991".

SEC. 2. ELIGIBILITY FOR BURIAL ALLOWANCE.
Subsection (a) of section 902 of title 38, United States Code, is amended to read as follows:
"(a) Where a veteran dies--
"(1) of a service-connected disability; or
"(2) who was--
"(A) a veteran of any war;
"(B) discharged from the active military, naval, or air service for a disability incurred or aggravated in line of duty; or
"(C) in receipt of (or but for the receipt of retirement pay

would have been entitled to) disability compensation; the Secretary, in the Secretary's discretion, having due regard to the circumstances in each case, may pay a sum not exceeding $400 to such person as the Secretary prescribes to cover the burial and funeral expenses of the deceased veteran and the expense of preparing the body and transporting it to the place of burial. For the purpose of this subsection, the term 'veteran' includes a person who died during a period deemed to be active military, naval, or air service under section 106(c) of this title.".

SEC. 3. INCREASE IN THE BURIAL PLOT ALLOWANCE.

Paragraphs (1) and (2) of section 903(b) of title 38, United States Code, are amended by striking out "$150" each place it appears and inserting in lieu thereof "$300".

44-598 0 - 91 (160)

ADDENDUM
NATIONAL CEMETERY SYSTEM

HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON
HOUSING AND MEMORIAL AFFAIRS

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED SECOND CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

APRIL 18, 1991

Printed for the use of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs

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Reserve Officers Association of the United States
The Professional Association Representing All Officers

April 2, 1991

The Honorable Harley O. Staggers, Jr.
Chairman, Subcommittee on Housing and
Memorial Affairs
U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Veterans Affairs
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

Thank you for your letter of 21 March 1991, informing the Reserve Officers Association that you will conduct a hearing on 18 April as part of the Subcommittee's Department of Veterans Affairs National Cemetery System oversight responsibilities.

We are pleased to note that among the items for consideration by your Subcommittee is a proposal to create burial eligibility for members of the Selected Reserve who have served at least 20 years. ROA strongly supports this proposal and enclosed is a copy of Resolution #88-18, which was adopted at our National Convention in June 1988, supporting such a VA burial entitlement for qualified members of the Reserve. We see this to be a proper recognition of the personal commitment to the defense of these United States that members of the Reserve Components have demonstrated over an extended period.

Recognizing that the Committee's time is extremely valuable and that you have a number of areas under consideration, please consider this letter to be the Reserve Officers Association's official comments on eligibility for burial in the national cemetery system of members of the Selected Reserve who have served at least twenty years. I would appreciate it if a copy of this letter and the attached Resolution could be included in the record of the hearing.

On behalf of the members of the Reserve Officers Association I would like to express our deepest appreciation for the dedicated service to our nation and its veterans provided by you and the members of your Committee.

Sincerely,

Evan L. Hultman

Evan L. Hultman
Major General, AUS (Ret.)
Executive Director

(1)

Resolution No. 88-18
(Veterans)

RESERVE OFFICERS ASSOCIATION OF THE UNITED STATES

Title III VA Burial Entitlements

WHEREAS, members of the Reserve Components, who die under honorable circumstances while serving on active duty for training or performing full-time service, are entitled to burial in the national cemeteries operated by the Veterans Administration; and

WHEREAS, those armed forces members who have not served on extended active duty but who have 20 years of Reserve service, which qualifies them for retired pay at age 60, are entitled to burial in Arlington National Cemetery but not in the national cemeteries operated by the Veterans Administration; and

WHEREAS, those same armed forces members have demonstrated their continuing personal commitment to the defense of these United States for at least 20 years, often at great personal sacrifice; and

WHEREAS, requiring bereaved family members to travel to Arlington, Va., for the internment of the remains in a national cemetery results in undue expenses and hardships;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Reserve Officers Association of the United States, chartered by Congress, urge the Congress to amend the entitlement to burial in national cemeteries operated by the Veterans Administration (38 US Code 1002) to permit burial of those armed forces members who have 20 years or more Reserve service, which qualifies them for retired pay.

Adopted by the National Convention
25 June 1988

Attest: Evan L. Hultman

Evan L. Hultman
Major General, AUS (Ret.)
National Executive Director

WRITTEN COMMITTEE QUESTIONS AND THEIR RESPONSE

DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

CONGRESSMAN STAGGERS

Question: A Los Angeles Times article dated April 10 quotes Mr. Principi stating that the Department was going to request $10 million for the National Cemetery System. What is the status of this funding request?

Answer: The planned reprogramming is not for $10 million but rather for $3 million. Language has been included in H.R. 2519, the 1992 appropriation bill for the Department of Veterans Affairs, which would transfer $3 million of the 1991 General Operating Expenses appropriation from the Veterans Benefits Administration to the National Cemetery System. This bill has passed both the House of Representatives and the Senate and Conference committee action is pending. The White House also included the $3 million transfer provision in a FY 1991 FEMA supplemental appropriation request currently being considered by Congress. The National Cemetery System plans to allocate $1 million of the requested supplemental to Riverside National Cemetery to continue its restoration process, and $2 million throughout the cemetery system for purchase of needed equipment, supplies, materials and contracts.

Question: The Department's testimony mentions that the National Cemetery System has access to $32 billion budget. What did the program initially justify in its budget presentation? How much will you allocate to the National Cemetery System. From what programs will you take those funds?

Answer: The National Cemetery System request to OMB for 1992 was for $68 million. The OMB allowance for 1992 totalled $57 million. The proposed $3 million additional funding which is proposed for transfer to NCS for 1991 is available as a result of savings in telecommunications costs.

Question: The Disabled American Veterans state that only six cemeteries have columbaria. Have you considered establishing more since this could increase the life span of certain open cemeteries and possibly open some closed cemeteries?

Answer: The DAV figure is correct; there are currently columbaria at six national cemeteries. The National Cemetery System plans to construct columbaria at 40 national cemeteries by the end of 1997, of which 6 are planned for 1992. In addition, the national cemeteries are being reviewed to identify space for in-ground burial of cremated remains.

Question: How much would you need for a one-time allocation of enough funds to clear up your entire backlog?

Answer: The National Cemetery System (NCS) would require a one-time infusion of $8.4 million to replace the entire equipment backlog.

Question: It is stated that the operations and maintenance of the National Memorial Cemetery of Arizona suffers due to a statutorily imposed funding cap for the first six months of 1992 enacted as part of the legislation that transferred that cemetery from the State of Arizona to NCS. Could you explain the problem for the record? Could you also explain why you did not ask for increased funding for staffing levels for this cemetery in your 1992 budget request?

Answer: During the cemetery's first three years of operations as a national cemetery (4/1/89-3/31/92), Public Law 100-322, Sections 346(f) and 346(a)(2) require that the operational and maintenance costs of the National Memorial Cemetery of Arizona be funded entirely by reimbursements from the Compensation and Pensions (C&P) appropriation and the State of Arizona. The contribution from C&P is limited by the statute to $150 per eligible veteran interred (as estimated at the start of the year). The State was to provide funding to supplement the allowable Federal expenditures during this three year period. The total three year State contribution, however, is capped at $390,000 as part of the transfer agreement between the State and the Department of Veterans Affairs. This negotiated cap was based upon an estimate of the funding requirements for the cemetery that was derived from State expenditure levels for the cemetery and estimates of the future interment levels. (The statute only required the State to supplement funding in an amount necessary so that the level of operation and maintenance as of the date of the agreement could be maintained.) The costs of operating and maintaining the cemetery to the standards of a National Cemetery have exceeded the previous State expenditure levels.

The result is that the legislated cap on the use of Federal appropriated funds is causing considerable operational difficulty at this cemetery as the staff do their best to operate at the standards expected for a National Cemetery. They are staffed with 9 FTEE, though the current workload based on uniform NCS standards, requires 15 FTEE. The first half of fiscal year 1992, the last six months of the legislated cap, will be especially difficult, because only $125,000 will be available for this six month period. The operating and maintenance costs of this cemetery, if fully staffed and funded, for this same six month period would be $400 thousand.

The recommended solution is to have the statutory language amended to allow the National Cemetery System (NCS) to obligate General Operating Expenses appropriation funding during this six month period. This change would allow NCS to meet the critical operational funding needs of this cemetery. It is requested that this change be enacted and effective prior to October 1, 1991, the start of fiscal year 1992, because of the especially severe shortfall in funding for that fiscal year, as detailed above.

No additional funding or staffing was requested for this cemetery for the first half of 1992, because it could not have been spent as a result of the legislated funding cap as previously outlined. The balance of the year will require $253,000 for this cemetery which will be redirected to meet the needs at this cemetery.

Question: It is stated that the Department plans to emphasize recognition of national cemeteries as national shrines by making the public aware of the historic importance of national cemeteries and by developing an educational enrichment program directed towards school-age children. What levels of funding have you allocated to this program? When it is scheduled to begin?

Answer: The program is currently in the conceptual development phase. There is no target date set as yet for its implementation. The program as currently envisioned will include a 15 to 20 minute video tape presentation highlighting the development of the National Cemetery System and some of the famous individuals who are buried there; a 12 to 16 page illustrated booklet to be given to the students; and a walking tour to be conducted by trained volunteers. The estimated start-up costs are estimated at $180,000 to $250,000 for research, design, development, as well as printing and video production costs for the booklet and video. Recurring costs would be from $10,000 to $15,000 for dispensable supplies including small flags and the reproduction of cemetery-specific handouts. Because of the current needs of the cemeteries for operating funds, NCS hopes to fund this educational program from donations or grants to its gift fund.

CONGRESSMAN STEARNS

Question: What cemetery systems are contracted out?

Answer: The following 27 national cemeteries are maintained by contract:

Alton (Illinois)
Annapolis (Maryland)
Balls Bluff (Virginia)
Baton Rouge (Louisiana)
Cave Hill (Kentucky)
City Point (Virginia)
Cold Harbor (Virginia)
Crown Hill (Indiana)
Cypress Hills (New York)
Danville (Virginia)
Fort Harrison (Virginia)
Fort Richardson (Alaska)
Glendale (Virginia)
Jefferson City (Missouri)
Lexington (Kentucky)
Loudon Park (Maryland)
Mill Springs (Kentucky)
Mobile (Alabama)
Mound City (Illinois)
Philadelphia (Pennsylvania)
Richmond (Virginia)
St. Augustine (Florida)
San Antonio (Texas)
Seven Pines (Virginia)
Sitka (Alaska)
Staunton (Virginia)
Wilmington (North Carolina)

Question: What would be VA's position on contracting out open cemetery operations which include gravesite preparation, grounds maintenance and equipment maintenance?

Answer: As a general rule it is not practical or cost-effective to contract out such activities at active cemeteries. The National Cemetery System believes that interment operations should be performed by VA employees. The gravesite preparation, grounds maintenance, and equipment maintenance functions, however, mesh tightly with the interment functions. Contracting out those functions would require constant and close interaction between the contract personnel and the government personnel who perform the interments. This situation would result in operational, as well as administrative management, problems.

In the smaller, inactive cemeteries which are currently contracted out, we have experienced a lack of availability of contractors who are willing and able to perform the work. Additionally, there have been a number of defaults by contractors. In such cases the rebidding involves substantially higher costs because the other contractors know that the government is anxious to get the cemetery contracted out quickly. Also, our experience has shown that, even when we are successful in securing a capable contractor, the government is subjected to escalated contract costs in subsequent years. In the long run, at active cemeteries, contracting out the suggested functions will result in higher costs to the government.

NCOA

Non Commissioned Officers Association of the United States of America

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FOLLOW - UP

STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD

OF

RICHARD C. SCHNEIDER

FOR THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND MEMORIAL AFFAIRS

OF THE

NATIONAL CEMETERY SYSTEM

APRIL 18, 1991

QUESTION submitted by Honorable Cliff Sterns to the Non Commissioned Officers Association at the Subcommittee on Housing and Memorial Affairs:

1. Please comment on H.R. 103. Does the NCOA support this bill? Are there specific provisions of the Bill which are of particular interest or concern?

ANSWER: As noted in public testimony NCOA fully supports H.R. 103. NCOA recommends passage of the bill noting that proposed increases are long overdue.

RESPONSE OF THE ENLISTED ASSOCIATION OF THE NATIONAL GUARD OF THE UNITED STATES

TO
QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY HONORABLE CLIFF STEARNS
TO THE AMERICAN CEMETERY ASSOCIATION
AT THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND MEMORIAL AFFAIRS
APRIL 18, 1991

1) Please comment on H.R. 103. Does the National Guard Association support this bill? Are there specific provisions of the bill which are of particular interest or concern?

RESPONSE

We at EANGUS support H.R. 103. Any issue that gives added benefits to our Nation's Armed Forces is considered to be a positive step towards recognizing the efforts of the world's finest military. This bill is of interest to our Association because 94 percent of the men and women in the Guard are already eligible for the VA burial benefit due to prior service, or for other reasons. Given that such a large number of our members will be affected by the passage of H.R. 103, we have been watching it's development closely.

**QUESTION SUBMITTED BY HONORABLE CLIFF STEARNS
TO THE AMERICAN CEMETERY ASSOCIATION
AT THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON HOUSING & MEMORIAL AFFAIRS
HEARING OF APRIL 18, 1991**

1) *Please comment on H.R. 103. Does the American Cemetery Association support this bill? Are there specific provisions of the bill which are of particular interest or concern?*

Response of the American Cemetery Association

The American Cemetery Association (ACA) supports H.R.103, "The Veterans' Burial Benefits Act of 1991," which would restore the eligibility of war veterans to receive the basic VA burial allowance, and further, would raise the allowance from $300 to $400. War veterans were originally entitled to receive this allowance until 1981 when Congressional action disqualified them in the absence of additional criteria. In the wake of last November's elimination of the VA marker allowance and the curtailment of the plot allowance, which again disqualified war veterans from eligibility, remedial legislation to address the inequities in VA burial benefits is urgently needed.

As ACA has testified, we believe that the cutbacks in the plot and burial allowances will achieve only limited, short-term savings which will be more than offset by large future deficits when significant numbers of veterans and their families are forced to use the facilities of the National Cemetery System (NCS) as an alternative to these discontinued benefits. Eligibility for burial in the National Cemeteries is based entirely upon a service discharge which is other than dishonorable and extends to spouses and certain dependents. Eligibility for the plot and burial allowances, however, is limited to the veteran alone and requires entitlement to VA disability, pension or other forms of compensation. By operating under inconsistent VA eligibility criteria for burial benefits, the NCS will almost certainly experience unpredictable caseloads for future interments under these circumstances.

VA statistics indicate that 85 percent of all burial benefits were provided through the plot allowance, prior to its curtailment effective November 1, 1990. ACA has estimated that approximately 70 percent of the veterans entitled to receive the plot allowance are now ineligible. However, if only 10 percent of the veterans estimated to receive the plot allowance in 1990 applied instead for burial in the National Cemeteries, the NCS burial caseload for 1990 would have increased by over 50 percent. The VA would be discharging its burial obligations through the most costly means possible, interment in National Cemeteries, which entails perpetual and escalating maintenance costs in the future as opposed to the one-time payment of the plot or burial allowance.

H.R.103 would not only redress the inequity of excluding war veterans from receiving the burial allowance, it would help establish the financial stability of the National Cemetery System. For these reasons, the American Cemetery Association supports the passage of H.R.103.

5/15/91

Congressman Stearns to Veterans of Foreign Wars

QUESTION: Please comment on H.R. 103. Does the VFW support this bill? Are there specific provisions of the bill which are of particular interest or concern?

RESPONSE: The VFW strongly supports H.R. 103. This bill is very similar to VFW Resolution No. 735 entitled RESTORE ENTITLEMENT TO THE VA BURIAL ALLOWANCE. A copy of Resolution No. 735 is appended to our statement on "oversight of the National Cemetery System" dated April 18, 1991. We note, with approval, H.R. 103 takes the initiative to increase the amount of the burial allowance from a maximum of $300 to $400, and increases the plot allowance from $150 to $300.

Collectively, H.R. 103 restores the moral obligation promised to all our veterans at the time of their induction into wartime military service, to provide them with reasonable compensation for funeral costs. The VFW certainly supports all legislative efforts to reinstate this deserved benefit.